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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES
AND
A FRENCH MARRIAGE BY F. C. PHILIPS.
IN ONE VOLUME.

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EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

A NOVEL

AND

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A NOVEL

BY

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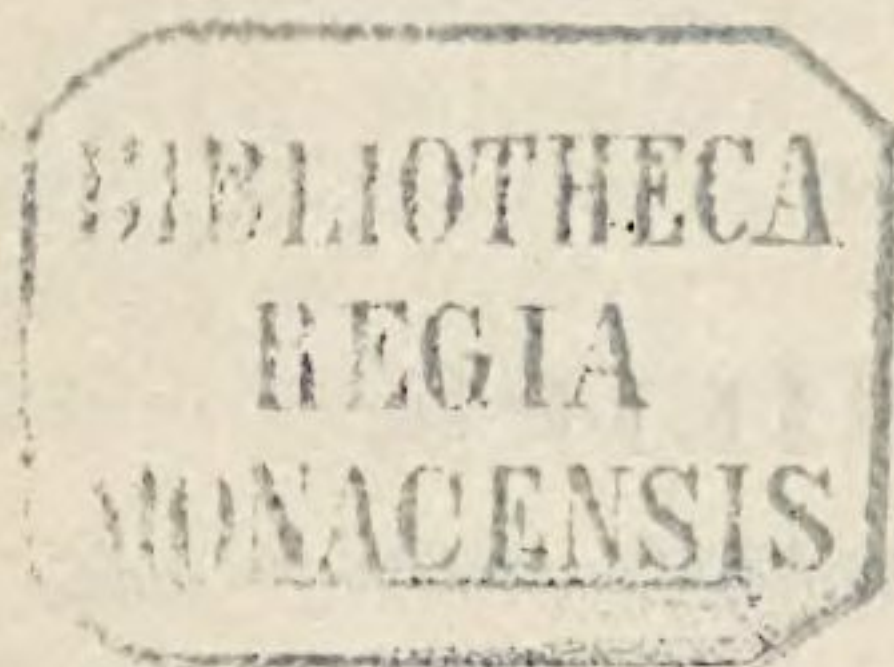
AUTHOR OF "AS IN A LOOKING GLASS," ETC. ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1891.



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CHAPTER III

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EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

CHAPTER I.

“VOLTAIRE described England as a land of fog, with a hundred religions and one sauce; and in the main no doubt he was perfectly right. Time was when I abused it myself, Heaven knows, and was glad enough to get out of it, but after all there is no place like it for solid comfort.”

Roger Alwyn flung his *Figaro* aside as he glanced round the room. His face wore an expression of utter disgust. It was a dingy little *salon* in which he sat; indeed all the houses were more or less dingy in the Rue Louise. But

one does not expect luxury at thirty-five francs a week, and life in a boarding-house is not, as a rule, an earthly elysium, and in this instance it was very much the reverse.

Mr. Alwyn flicked away a fly from the Dresden shepherdess, a young lady who, in very short skirts and a very long crook, ogled her mate in a straw hat and coat of many colours, on the other side of the ormolu clock. Poor old clock! It had never been known to keep time correctly for more than half-an-hour together since Mr. Alwyn had taken up his residence beneath Madame Blanche's roof. But then it looked imposing; and appearances carry conviction to the multitude.

It was a pity that the curtains which hung in a lop-sided, half-hearted fashion over the windows were not washed a little oftener, but after all that was a matter of detail, and Madame Blanche's boarders rarely troubled their heads about anything less important than the flavouring

of the *soupe maigre* or the anatomical proportions of the fowls and roasts. But then Mr. Alwyn was not one of the common herd—unfortunately for himself. Five years ago he would have shuddered at the bare idea of leading such a life as the present one, and even now he looked back on the flesh-pots of Egypt with a poignant regret and a keen sense of self-pity. But there was no help for him. A man must cut his coat according to the amount of the cloth, and with a purse filled but scantily, it is clearly the duty of a prudent parent to husband his resources. And Mr. Alwyn was a parent. There was the rub. “If it were not for Joan” he used always to be repeating. But Joan was a tangible reality—a well-grown and healthy young woman whom Madame Blanche flatly refused to take on reduced terms, and she was his daughter.

Joan was very beautiful. She was lithe and shapely, with clustering curls of ruddy bronze about her well-poised head, and great brown

sleepy eyes with their double curve of heavy lashes. But though every man of her acquaintance admired her, many of her own sex found her "wanting in style, my dear—too colourless."

It has been wisely said that early information and unlimited credit will ruin a man having at his back the resources of the Bank of England. Now Roger Alwyn was unlucky enough to become possessed of the early information, and although he had not the resources of the Bank of England, still he was sufficiently well-off to hazard large sums of money in Stock Exchange speculations. The unhappy man engaged in an unequal conflict, buoyed up with that sanguine expectation that carries the "fool" where "angels fear to tread," and he had no thought of the brown-eyed, motherless girl who had hitherto been brought up in the lap of luxury.

Mr. Alwyn had immense confidence in his own sagacity, but in reality he was a mere child in the hands of those with whom he had to deal.

One morning he awoke to the bitter knowledge that he was a ruined man, and that he had only himself to thank for it. It is doubtful if the fact that we have ourselves manufactured the rod that is to scourge us for our follies ever yet brought a particle of comfort with it. It certainly did not in Mr. Alwyn's case. He raged at fate, luck, fortune—anything and everything but himself.

Joan, on the other hand, received the news with perfect calmness. There would be something left, she imagined, and, never having experienced the want of money, she was perhaps a little apt to undervalue its importance. Her father had no fault to find with her. She agreed without a murmur that they should take up their residence at Boulogne, though it must be confessed she hated turning her back on London. She clung to the belief that things would right themselves sooner or later, and that it was not for ever that they must sojourn in the little

French town. Meanwhile she took the gifts the gods had left her and was proportionately thankful. But all this happened three years ago. Joan was older and wiser now and perhaps not quite so contented.

Roger Alwyn groaned within himself as month after month passed by and no suitor for his daughter's hand presented himself. Nor was this to be wondered at, for in a second-rate boarding-house neither millionaires nor exceptionally good matches are to be found.

And Joan must marry. "It is a sort of necessity that every woman acknowledges," said Mr. Alwyn to himself, "and anything short of a really good match would be suicidal in Joan's case. Thank God," he reflected, "there is no fear of her ever going aground on the rock that has shipwrecked so many of her sex. She must marry, and marry well, and why not?" he asked himself. "She has beauty, talent, family,"—docking on his fingers one by one her marketable

points; "and she has a father whom no son-in-law need blush to own, I flatter myself."

But on what else Mr. Alwyn felt justified in flattering himself will never be recorded, for at that juncture the door opened and Joan herself appeared dressed for walking.

"Are you not coming out, father?"

"Well, my dear, no."

Joan buttoned her long mousquetaire gloves and then leant forward and dropped a careless kiss upon her father's forehead.

"I—I don't think—in fact, Joan, I object to your going out so much alone," began Mr. Alwyn in an aggressive tone.

The girl looked at him in the most profound astonishment.

"Not go about alone!" she cried. "Am I then to remain indoors all day? My dear father, what has put such a notion in your head? Since you don't care to accompany me yourself, and I have no longer a maid to dance attendance upon

me, there is no alternative. I am perfectly independent, and quite capable of taking care of myself."

"It doesn't look well," said Mr. Alwyn in irritable tones, "it doesn't look well, my dear. You forget, Joan, that a girl in your position—my daughter——"

"Yes, father," answered Joan, dropping her eyes demurely. "Well, what do you wish me to do?"

Mr. Alwyn clasped his plump hands together on his lap.

"You may go now, my dear," he said airily, "since you seem bound upon doing so, but for the future—perhaps."

"Very well, papa."

Joan spoke quite dutifully, but as she walked slowly into the little courtyard a smile broke over her face—a smile that was followed by a little wistful sigh.

She had no particular interest in going out

alone. She preferred to have her father with her, although Mr. Alwyn's best friend could hardly have considered him a brilliant companion. But Joan understood him. Perhaps she was the only person in the world who did understand him, and her heart ached for him—ached for his ruined life and his disappointed hopes. There was a great deal of self-abnegation about Joan. If it were hard for her, she thought, why then it must be doubly hard for her father. He was the one man she admired and looked up to. Truth to tell, she thoroughly believed in him. Poor child! She had faith in his strength of mind, and in the abilities that would have made a great man of him had it not been that fate was against him. Of the granite mass of selfishness that dominated his every-day life, and sheltered itself beneath the cloak of pride and self-respect, she recognised nothing.

It did not seem to her strange and contemptible that her father should be content to sit

in idleness, having dragged his daughter with him into the pitiful chaos his wretched obstinacy had made of their lives. She sympathised with the feeling that rendered it impossible for an Alwyn of St. Alwyn to put his shoulder to the wheel and earn an honest sixpence. Thus it was that if ever a girl was devoted to her father and blind to his failings, that girl was Joan Alwyn.

CHAPTER II.

It was a lovely day in the early part of July, and Joan made her way down the Rue Thiers into the Rue Victor Hugo, sauntering along in an apparently aimless fashion, uncertain whither to bend her steps. The air was delicious—fresh and balmy; and a breeze blowing straight from the sea for once was not redolent of harbour-mud and unsavouriness. The tide was coming in and she passed on to the Quay, and through the Casino gates to the sands.

“It will be too tiresome if papa gets a crotchet into his head about my rambles alone,” she thought sadly. For a young girl Joan enjoyed a great deal of liberty, and was, as she had said, perfectly independent.

“Who in the world,” she reflected, “is there

to interfere with me? I never see a soul I know." A moment afterwards she turned to find herself face to face with someone who evidently was no stranger.

"Mr. Thurston!" she cried, a slight blush mantling her cheek; and she extended her hand and then as quickly withdrew it. "I had no idea you were in Boulogne."

Frank Thurston could scarcely be called a handsome man, but there was something in the indolent grey eyes and set mouth and chin that many women found extremely attractive. And although he had only known Joan Alwyn for the short space of three weeks he had contrived to make her think of him a good deal.

"You are not staying with us," said Joan—"at Madame Blanche's I mean?"

"On the contrary, yes. Where else should I be staying? I arrived by the two o'clock boat, sent on my luggage to the Rue Louise, and came for a stroll on the sands. But I did not dream

of any such good fortune as meeting Miss Alwyn."

Joan's cheeks were still warm with colour, and she was conscious of a feeling of uneasiness. But she was delighted to see Mr. Thurston. There could be no possible question as to that. And then she began to wonder whether it was right that they should be walking side by side along the golden sands like old acquaintances. After all she knew nothing of him except that he had been a boarder in the same establishment as herself, and although her father appeared predisposed in his favour, she felt morally convinced that he would be seriously displeased if there were any undue intimacy between them, and so Joan looked, as she felt, thoroughly uncomfortable.

But such an opportunity as the present was not to be lost. Mr. Thurston felt it must have been for some good reason that fate had turned his footsteps where Joan's had strayed, and with

considerable deliberation he commenced the task of bringing back the smiles to his companion's face. And so well did he succeed that Joan forgot her scruples.

Perhaps the greatest charm about Frank Thurston was his individuality. He was entirely different from anyone whom Joan had as yet ever come in contact with, and he interested her.

It was close upon the dinner hour when the young people arrived at the Rue Louise. Neither of them had any suspicion that it was so late, and Joan ran upstairs to make her toilet with what haste she might. When she took her place at the table d'hôte she found that Mr. Thurston was to be her next-door neighbour. How slight a thing has power to alter the aspect of our surroundings! The dinner was in no way tedious that night—everything seemed to be cheery and bright, and there was a "go" about it that had hitherto been painfully wanting.

"Glad to see you back among us," said Mr.

Alwyn cordially, glancing across his daughter. "Had a pleasant crossing?"

"Yes, exceptionally so," replied Mr. Thurston. "I find it much warmer here than in London."

"Ah!" said Mr. Alwyn, and then relapsed into silence.

Joan was not hungry, despite her long walk, but she thought the salmi of chicken particularly good until Mr. Alwyn grumbled audibly.

"Made of old kid gloves! Filthy mess!"

Truth to tell the secret lay in Joan's own heart. She felt happy. A ray of sunshine had fallen across her path and she was dazzled.

But she was a little disappointed when she found that Mr. Thurston did not make his appearance in the drawing-room that evening, and after her father had gone to bed, as he usually did at ten o'clock, she took her book and went over to the open window. But though she took her book she did not turn a page. Mrs. Money-penny, a widow on the look out for a second

husband, was carrying on an animated conversation with a certain Miss Duval, a lady on the wrong side of forty who prided herself on her aristocratic connection and gave herself corresponding airs. The two ladies sat with their heads very close together, and Joan's lip curled a little scornfully. She hated gossip and would never lend an ear to scandal in any form.

But by-and-by a word or two reached her.

"Odd." "So unexpected." "Madame was quite astonished." "A mere chance that there is a room vacant." Clearly they were talking of Mr. Thurston. Joan told herself that she was not in the very slightest degree interested, but nevertheless she listened eagerly.

"Rich—is he not?"

"So I am told, or will be, at his father's death. An only son—brilliant abilities, everyone says. Just called to the Bar."

"Old Mr. Thurston lives in the North, I believe?" said Miss Duval.

This was merely a feeler, for she really knew nothing at all about the matter.

"Sir Godfrey Thurston, my dear!"

"Oh, yes, of course, I had forgotten."

With tingling cheeks and fast-beating heart, Joan gazed out of the open window. So he was rich! Somehow she had conceived the notion that he was badly off, but his poverty or his riches made not the slightest difference to Joan, and was absolutely without any effect on her mind.

Mr. Alwyn had evidently forgotten his anxiety about a chaperon for his daughter, and made no further objection when each afternoon she wished him good-bye with a kiss and went off demurely for her accustomed walk.

Now, curiously enough, no matter in what direction she turned, Frank Thurston was sure to overtake her sooner or later; and by-and-by she grew to watch for his coming, and the rose-

red blush that lit up her beautiful face was more eloquent than spoken words. And yet there was so little to tell. They did not often talk a great deal, but they took a vast amount of pleasure in each other's presence, and sighed regretfully when the "enemy," as Mr. Thurston laughingly called his watch, proclaimed the fact that they must be thinking of returning to the *pension*, and that for four-and-twenty hours their *tête-à-tête* was at an end.

But there came a day when Joan waited in vain for her companion. Up and down the narrow strip of sand she paced, but there was no one in sight but nursemaids and their charges, and a sense of disappointment was strong upon her as she turned into the Rue Victor Hugo. There she met Miss Duval, and not a little to her disgust found that that lady was bent on accompanying her home.

"Always alone! Poor child. Are you not sadly lonely?" asked Miss Duval.

"No," said Joan, almost crossly, "I am used to it."

"I wish we had more young people at Madame's," said Miss Duval gushingly. "There really is no one but ourselves and Mr. Clayton."

Mr. Clayton was a mild and inoffensive curate with weak eyes and a lisp, and Joan cordially detested him.

"There is Mr. Thurston," said she, feeling vexed with herself that the mere mention of his name had power to disturb her.

"Oh, I don't count him, as he will soon be gone."

"Gone!" she echoed. "Why, when is he going?" And in her consternation Joan stood stock still.

"Oh, you naughty girl," cried Miss Duval playfully. "I do believe—now confess."

Joan would have dearly liked to shake her, but as that was impossible she tried to smile.

"I didn't know he was going away," she said lamely.

"He received news this morning that will shorten his stay. At least, that is what Madame told us, but let us hope we shall not lose him just yet."

"I am sure I don't care whether he goes or stays," said Joan, with a flash of indignation.

But I am sure she did care, and cared so much that after she had changed her walking dress for the pretty cream-coloured frock she wore in the evening, and pinned a crimson rose at her slender throat which he had given her two days ago—a flower which, with infinite pains, she had preserved fresh until now—she suddenly burst into tears.

Joan rarely wept and she was heartily ashamed of herself now. She dashed some cold water over her face, and with almost a defiant air marched down stairs. Mr. Thurston's place was empty, and the dinner was a long and

dreary one. The day came to an end at last, and with a sigh of relief Joan followed her father upstairs. They had the salon to themselves. Everyone had gone to the *Établissement*. Mr. Thurston had hinted at the possibility of his making one of the party, and it was more than probable that he would arrive later.

"Well, he will not find me there," reflected Joan, somewhat angrily.

"Are you not going with us, dear Miss Alwyn?" asked Miss Duval with quite a juvenile air, opening the door and peeping in.

"To the *Établissement* without me?" cried Mr. Alwyn, "most certainly not. Joan would not think of such a thing for a moment. You would find no pleasure in it, my dear child?" he continued, turning to his daughter.

"No, papa," said she, "I should not." The flavour seemed to have gone out of everything. At one time she had intended coaxing her father to let her join this expedition, but that

was yesterday. To-day she would infinitely prefer staying at home.

Miss Duval closed the door and went away, and as her high heels click-clacked along the tiled floor, her shrill voice could be heard declaiming against the barbarity that prevented a young girl from enjoying herself.

"What a woman!" cried Mr. Alwyn. "Heaven preserve me from her tongue! Joan, if I thought you could ever degenerate into such a specimen of humanity, I would put the seas between us. Now, my dear child, take warning. The whole secret of Miss Duval's offence is that she is an old maid. Nobody wants her, everybody laughs at her, and her life is one futile struggle to hold up her head and pretend to be something different from what she is. She deceives nobody but herself."

"Poor soul," murmured Joan softly. "But, papa, surely it is a happier lot to live a single life than to be unhappily married."

“My excellent Joan, let me tell you a little secret. Women expect too much from their husbands. It is a fatal error into which almost every young wife falls. ‘As I am, so thou must be’ is her creed, and no man since the world began ever yet walked straight along the lines laid down for a woman’s guidance. Absolute ignorance of the temptations that stand at a man’s right hand is the primary cause of mischief. What does not and never can appeal to the woman who is in love with her husband is a stumbling-block in his path. Says the woman, in her simplicity, ‘He is my husband, therefore he must be true to me.’ And ‘She is my wife, therefore it is a natural sequence that I should tire of her’ reflects the man.”

“Dear father, I hate to hear you talk in this strain,” cried Joan. “You, who loved my mother, should be the last to do so.”

“I am stating hard, incontrovertible facts,

Joan. There is nothing for a girl but marriage—indeed, she has no choice in the matter.”

“I cannot see that,” said Joan.

“Perhaps you can’t,” said her father, “but it is none the less true. Everybody marries nowadays except some very foolish women and some very wise men. But forewarned is forearmed, you know. Do not expect to find in your husband the lover he was before he married you. The woman is not born who ever had such an experience.”

The girl sighed. These were mysteries in life beyond her comprehension.

“I don’t think I am very anxious to get married,” she said at last. “At all events, I know the extent of the evils in my present life.”

“Don’t irritate me by talking such utter trash,” cried Mr. Alwyn. “There is but one fool greater than the woman who marries, and that is the woman who does not. For my sake, Joan,

you must marry, and marry well. There will be nothing for you when I am gone."

"Hush, dear," said Joan, sliding down from her chair and burying her arms round her father's neck. Please God we shall have many happy days to spend together yet. You do not want to get rid of me, do you?"

Mr. Alwyn hated anything approaching a scene, and almost imperceptibly drew himself away from his daughter's embrace. And Joan sprang to her feet, feeling repulsed and chilled.

"Of course I don't want to get rid of you, as you inelegantly phrase it," remarked Mr. Alwyn. "But it is a parent's first duty to secure the happiness of his child, and at whatever sacrifice to myself I should do it. I am not so young as I was, and my time may be but short——" His look of resignation to the decrees of Providence was inimitable.

"Even if—if——" cried Joan impetuously, but there was a lump in her throat that would

not be swallowed, and it was a minute or two before she could finish her sentence—"if I must share the common lot, and the more I love my husband the quicker wean him from me? It is not an alluring prospect after all. I think I had better become the wife of a man to whom I am perfectly indifferent."

"Ah, now you have hit it," said Mr. Alwyn.

He spoke with the air of one who had solved a knotty point, and looked at his daughter admiringly.

"If you want your husband to adore you, Joan, keep him at arm's length, repulse his advances, let him think you capricious, unreasonable—he will at least pause to analyse your motives, and so long as you can keep his thoughts busied with you he may possibly remain your lover. Believe me, my dear, there is nothing like the stand-off process. Few women, however, are capable of adopting it. They allow their hearts to run away with their common sense, and in

nine cases out of ten a woman bores to extinction the man she once fascinated."

Joan made no reply, and after Mr. Alwyn had taken himself and his cynicism away she sat silent and thoughtful. It was growing dark, and the evening air, laden with fragrant mignonette from the little balcony, stirred gently the laces at the window. How lonely she felt. Then, too, what a bitter feeling lay in her heart. She was necessary to no one's happiness. Her father did not want her, and had told her plainly that he expected her to marry, and that she owed it to him to make a good match. And Frank Thurston had forgotten her.

And then the door opened and a well-known form strode across the floor to her side, and the familiar voice cried cheerily:

"What luck! You are alone."

Joan was past speech. She laid her hands in his and never said a word. He did not appear to notice anything unusual, but drew a chair

close beside her and began talking rapidly. He had been beguiled by an old friend to make an excursion to a neighbouring village, and they had stopped to dine there. But he had remembered the proposed visit to the Casino that evening, and so had timed his return at an hour when they should all be out.

And Joan listened dreamily.

"Has Mr. Alwyn gone to his room?" asked the young man.

"Yes, ten minutes ago. Did you wish to see him?"

Mr. Thurston smiled. "Presently—perhaps. Just now I want you, and you only."

Joan looked up and for a moment gazed at the earnest eyes bent upon her, and something she read there made her turn away impatiently.

And then, how it all happened she could never remember afterwards. Her hands were in his, and he was telling her of his love and devotion. It was the old, old story—the Prince had

come into her life. Joan was standing at the golden gates of Eden.

In this dull world of ours, for one brief moment two souls were utterly and entirely happy. . Nevermore might they hope to taste unalloyed bliss; for drooping pinions drag back the world-worn soul and forbid it to soar into ecstacies.

CHAPTER III.

NEXT morning Joan awoke with cheeks flushed and happy, love-lit eyes. She had entered on her woman's heritage. She loved and knew herself to be beloved.

Frank Thurston had left Boulogne by the midnight boat, and he promised her that he would only be absent for a day or two at longest. Meanwhile she was to pave the way and break the news to her father. She had no misgivings with regard to the old gentleman. This indeed would be a match after his own heart.

Joan made short work of her dressing that morning. When she hurried down to the early cup of tea which Mr. Alwyn made a point of having served in the *petit salon* every morning for himself and his daughter—"Ces Anglais," as

Madame Blanche would say with a shrug of her ample shoulders, "they are nevere satisfied,"—she found by her plate an exquisite bunch of Maréchal Niel roses.

"Are these for you, my dear?" asked her father, and then, catching sight of Joan's radiant face, he continued, "What in the world is the matter?"

"Nothing, I hope, papa," stammered Joan. "I—I have something to tell you by and by. We will have our tea now." And she proceeded to add the exact mixture of milk and sugar to suit her father's taste.

They were quite alone. No other of Madame Blanche's boarders were so highly favoured, and if the quality of the beverage was somewhat doubtful, still no one else was permitted so much as a sip. When the metal tea-pot was drained of its last drop, Mr. Alwyn laid down his spoon.

"Well?" said he.

Joan did not find it so easy to tell her tale

now that it had come to the point, as she had at first imagined. She blushed a good deal and looked down nervously.

“I—” she began, with faltering accents. “That is to say—Mr. Thurston——” and here she came to a full stop.

“What in the name of Heaven are you driving at?” cried her father, who had reached that time of life when it is eminently unsatisfactory to be kept in suspense. “You don’t mean to say that he has made you an offer?”

Joan buried her smiling mouth in the yellow roses, and was mute.

“You have astonished me!” said Mr. Alwyn, and he took a long breath, not unmixed with satisfaction. “He belongs to an excellent family, and, although the estates are not entailed, he is the only son, and will, of course, inherit everything at the death of Sir Godfrey Thurston. I hear his father is not likely to be long-lived. Vansittart was talking about him at the club

yesterday; he knows him very well, and he was saying that he has got some complicated malady which is absolutely incurable. You have done a splendid thing for yourself, my dear child."

And then Joan took courage. "I love him," said she, "and he loves me. I am the happiest girl in the whole world."

For once in his life, Mr. Alwyn had no fault to find—there was no loophole for objection. This match would be beyond his wildest expectations. He began to think that Joan was an uncommonly shrewd girl, "devilish clever," said he to himself.

And then he asked suddenly, "Where is he? —Mr. Thurston, I mean?"

"He had a telegram from Sir Godfrey yesterday morning, saying that he was passing through town, and wished to see him, so he left by the midnight boat. He will be back on Friday."

"When, if I may ask, did his proposal take place?"

“Oh, papa, pray don’t think that I have been keeping anything from you,” said Joan, in distressful tones. “It all happened last night before—after—after you had gone to your room, and before they came back from the *Établissement*.”

Mr. Alwyn expressed his conviction that it would have been impossible that his daughter could have been guilty of so grave an offence as to allow him to remain in ignorance of what so nearly concerned himself. “You have seen so little of this young man,” he added by way of explanation, “that I may be pardoned for being entirely unprepared for such an announcement.”

Joan blushed painfully. She had not been altogether honest, insomuch as she had kept secret those pleasant little walks—but she could hardly speak of them now.

Considerably startled and a good deal annoyed was Joan when that same evening she received the congratulations of the whole house. Miss Duval in particular was most enthusiastic.

"You sly puss—you naughty girl," she cried playfully, wagging a bony forefinger at Joan. "Nobody ever suspected such a *dénouement*, nobody but myself. I must confess that I was not altogether surprised. Little things show which way the wind blows, and the glances, and——"

"There never was anything of the sort," cried Joan angrily.

"Oh, my dear, don't tell me. I know, and events have proved that my suspicions were correct. And when is it to be, my dear?"

"When is what to be?" asked Joan, positively tingling from head to foot.

"Why, the wedding of course."

Miss Duval was somewhat taken aback to see Joan rise from her chair and walk deliberately out of the room. It was too bad of her father, she thought to herself, and the poor girl felt very wroth. Her secret was still too new and too

wonderful to enable her to hear it discussed with equanimity by others.

"I know perfectly well what I am about, Joan," said Mr. Alwyn, when appealed to on the subject. "There can be no reason for hiding the truth, and it is far better that everyone should be informed of the engagement. I have made up my mind to write to Mr. Thurston to-night."

"Oh, papa, wait—wait until you hear from him."

There seemed to Joan something indelicate in this haste, and it jarred upon her and wounded her.

"My dear, there is nothing like driving the nail home, and striking while the iron is hot."

And as her father's meaning broke upon Joan's mind she turned away her face in an agony of shame, and refused to utter another word.

Mr. Alwyn was disposed to be gracious, and,

indeed, began to treat his daughter with considerable deference. The young couple would, of course, take up their residence in London. Mr. Thurston would do well at the Bar, where his great abilities, backed up by money, would have full play. The old gentleman in his mind's eye saw his daughter the wife of a wealthy and prominent Q. C., and felt that Providence had put a spoke in Fortune's wheel entirely on his own account. After all, it was only a fitting reward for the anxiety he had endured with regard to his daughter's future. And for himself—well, if his son-in-law should offer some small compensation for having robbed him of the sole joy he had on earth—his darling child—he would trample on the pride of the Alwyn race, and accept it, for Joan's sake.

"This is a wretched hole," he said, looking round him with a dissatisfied air.

"It is the best we can afford," answered Joan curtly, with the uncomfortable sense of being

rubbed the wrong way. Why would her father insist on harping on that one theme, the amount of benefit to accrue to them both by this match? Somehow it seemed to brush away the bloom and brightness from her dream of love.

Mr. Alwyn slept peacefully. No forebodings of trouble in store disturbed his slumbers, and he woke in the morning to the pleasurable sense of happier days to come with the substantial delights of ease and luxury. After breakfast he went for his morning walk, on this occasion alone, for Joan told her father that she had some letters to write, and made the announcement with so charming a blush that Mr. Alwyn came to the conclusion that he had never known before what a singularly beautiful girl his daughter was. He felt like the Duke in *Lothair* who thanks Providence that his children are not unworthy of him. He called at the newsagent's, and bought the *Times*, and opened the paper and scanned the sheets as he walked. And then

he staggered, stumbled, and sat down heavily on an iron seat.

“Good God!” he cried.

“On the 18th inst. at the British Embassy, Paris, Sir Godfrey Thurston, Bart., to Grace, widow of the late Thomas Laurence, Esqre., M.R.C.S.”

At one fell swoop down they went, all his expectations, all his projects, all his plans for the future, like a child's house of cards—down they went, and standing as he did amid the ruins of his castle in Spain, he recognised the fact that he was in precisely the same position financially as he had been for the last three years, and that he still should have Joan on his hands. For Frank Thurston as the only son of a rich man, and Frank Thurston as a struggling barrister with a probable crowd of brothers and sisters about his heels, and a crafty step-mother in-

fluencing his father to their advantage and against his, were two entirely different persons.

"Confound my ill luck!" cried Roger Alwyn savagely. "Upon my life I don't know what I have done that Providence should thus torment me."

He hardly thought of his daughter, who, while he was grinding his heel into the earth and muttering imprecations beneath his breath, lay face downwards on the bed, weeping the bitterest tears of her young life. The Gates of Paradise had closed upon her, and left her like another *peri* without.

CHAPTER IV.

It may easily be conceived what a painful shock it was to Frank Thurston when his father presented a young and extremely pretty woman to him as his newly-wedded wife. And Lady Thurston herself might be pardoned for putting her step-son down as a boor and a fool, for the poor fellow's tongue positively clave to the roof of his mouth, and he was literally incapable of speech.

No sentimental feelings regarding his own mother, into whose shoes this interloper had stepped, swayed him in the least. He was only a little lad of six or seven when his own mother had died, and he barely remembered her. But he was of course fully alive to the vital change Sir Godfrey's marriage would make in his own prospects.

The gossip at the Boulogne Club overheard by Mr. Alwyn was entirely erroneous, for the baronet was a hale and hearty, and well-preserved man of little more than fifty, and the lady of his choice was scarcely twenty-five.

As we have seen Sir Godfrey refrained from giving the slightest hint of his determination to take a second wife. Truth to tell he trusted to the suddenness of the announcement to dull the edge of the thrust. He saw his son only in the presence of his bride, and displayed a curious disinclination to looking him fairly and squarely in the face, which in some measure attested to the fact that he was not altogether at his ease.

Of course he had a perfect right to please himself, but marriage, a contract between the individuals concerned to the entire exclusion of all outsiders, is the one step in a man's life with which everyone busies himself, and thinks it incumbent upon him to proffer counsel. Sir God-

frey desired neither counsel nor congratulations. He had acted as he believed in his own interests, and had no misgivings with regard to the future. But naturally he did not expect his son, having come to man's estate, and being in a great measure dependent upon his liberality for means of support, to look upon the matter in the same light as he did.

"We are on the wing again to-morrow," he said, presently. "We have taken our passages in one of the North German Lloyd's steamers for New York and start from Southampton. Lady Thurston's relatives are over there, and we propose to make a visit of some months—eh, Grace, my dear?"

Yes, Lady Thurston thought it extremely unlikely that they would return to England before next spring. "So you will not be able to grow tired of me in my new character for a long time to come," she said archly, with a fascinating smile that was wholly lost upon the young man.

He dined with them at their hotel, and spent a thoroughly wretched evening.

"You will find I have done the utmost I can for you, my boy," said Sir Godfrey as his son took his leave. "I have left instructions with Coutts' to pay you quarterly the sum I have been in the habit of allowing you." This he said in a tone that showed the young man very clearly that he wished him to understand that beyond the sum in question his father was not prepared to go.

Frank shook hands with his step-mother, trying to infuse some cordiality into his manner, but his performance was a sorry failure, and so he went away without the faintest mention of the subject nearest to his heart, and to that of the girl he loved.

What was the use of saying anything about it? he asked himself bitterly. Amid the many joys and responsibilities his father had chosen to take upon his shoulders there was no thought for

him. He was crowded out. And then he went to his hotel in a turning out of the Strand and sat down to write Joan her first love-letter.

He told her everything honestly and frankly as a man should tell his sweetheart. When he proposed to her he thought himself to be fairly well off, with the prospect of inheriting his father's wealth and with the certainty that Sir Godfrey would always lend a helping hand in the time of difficulty. But now he had only himself to depend upon. It was better that they should look at facts as they were. If Joan would trust herself to him it would be the one delight of his life to work for her and make her future a dream of happiness. And then he added a few lines which an orthodox young lady with a dozen admirers would probably have laughed at, but which brought the tears to Joan's eyes and made her think very tenderly of this hero of hers. It was a sensible and manly letter. The writer sought to hide nothing, and in it he enclosed a communication to Mr. Alwyn

asking his consent to their betrothal and promising to wait any reasonable time for the consummation of their happiness. "At the present moment," he said, "my income is £300 a year, but I will not ask your daughter to be my wife until by my own exertions I have doubled this amount."

If anything could have intensified Mr. Alwyn's wrath and disgust it was this letter of Frank Thurston's.

"For consummate impudence and cool cheek commend me to this young jackanapes!" he cried angrily. "Does the idiot imagine that I am going to consent to Joan taking up her residence in a pauper's home?" And he forthwith penned a reply that called the hot blood to his correspondent's cheek and forced an ugly word from between his lips.

It was a very stormy interview between Joan and her father. In vain the girl pleaded that all she and her lover wanted was to be permitted to see each other occasionally. They would not even

call themselves engaged if Mr. Alwyn objected. "But," said poor Joan, "if you part us now you will break my heart."

"Rubbish!" cried Mr. Alwyn vehemently. "Every girl thinks and talks in this fashion at some time or other in her life. Hearts don't break in the nineteenth century."

"I didn't think you could be so hard," said Joan wistfully.

"It is for your own good," answered he. And with a rueful glance his daughter recalled many a bitter draught and salutary punishment which at the time of their being administered she had been advised was for her benefit—a fact which she had utterly failed to recognise. No reasonings, no cogent arguments could make her believe that it would be better for her to give up the love of Frank Thurston.

"Father," she said humbly, "as your daughter I owe you obedience. I will never marry without your sanction, but you must understand that I

absolutely refuse to give this man up. I love him and I will wait for him if need be for years."

"Love!" echoed Mr. Alwyn with a sneer, and he leant back in his chair and laughed an uncanny sort of laugh as his daughter closed the door after her.

Only fools and maidens believe in love, thought Mr. Alwyn. What is love? The caprice of the moment, untangible, fleeting, gone. I am not going to let my girl sacrifice herself to any such humbug, Mr. Alwyn said determinedly. If she had only herself to think of she might do as she chose, but as matters stand I must be considered. After all, what does it matter? One man will be precisely the same as another at the end of a twelvemonth. But the difficulty is to find the other man.

Mr. Alwyn knitted his brows and pondered deeply, and the result of his cogitations took the form of a letter addressed to:

Madame Saurien,

118 bis, Boulevard Haussmann,

Paris.

“DEAR EUGENIE:—

“If you have entirely forgotten my existence, glance at the outer page of this letter, when the name of Roger Alwyn may bring to your remembrance an old and ardent admirer. I say ‘old’ advisedly, for I am old and broken down in health and spirits. For three years I have been living in seclusion with my daughter Joan, and it is on her behalf that I am now writing to you. Since the terrible misfortune which wrecked my life and left me stranded, I have been living in a second-rate *pension*, seeing none of my old friends, and I need scarcely say that the society with which I have been surrounded has hardly been of that character to which you and I were so long accustomed. For myself it signifies little, but for Joan such a state of affairs is most prejudicial.

“Now, dear old friend, rail against marriage

though we may, we all realise that it is the only channel open to a beautiful woman. Will you invite my daughter to visit you and throw her with such of your acquaintances as would be likely to prove desirable *partis*? There is no one but you of whom I should ask such a favour, but in your case I do so with confidence, relying on your goodness of disposition and the affection you have ever professed for

“Yours devotedly,

“ROGER ALWYN.

“P.S. A certain locket still hangs on my watch chain. The wealth of the Indies could not buy it. R. A.”

A few days later Mr. Alwyn handed Joan a letter, a letter which was an answer to his appeal, and he told her to make her preparations for a visit to Paris without delay. At first she flatly refused to go. She knew that Frank might return at any

moment, and she determined that she would not leave Boulogne without having seen him.

Mr. Alwyn was not long in bringing his parental authority to bear upon the matter. He entreated, he commanded, he threatened, he fumed, and he raged, and in the end Joan had to yield. Her life at this period was by no means a bed of roses.

Now that it was too late, Mr. Alwyn felt the utmost regret that he had been so precipitate in making the announcement of his daughter's engagement to Mr. Thurston. Of course everybody had seen that fatal announcement in the *Times*, and one and all were agog with curiosity to know how the affair was to end.

Miss Duval lifted her hands in consternation. "I think he is a very wicked young man to have deceived our poor child in this heartless fashion," she cried, apparently assuming that Frank Thurston had known of and aided and abetted

his father's marriage and the consequent downfall of his own hopes and prospects. But if congratulations had been hateful to Joan, how much more trying was the ordeal she had now to pass through!—she was literally pelted with expressions of sympathy and pity of the most gushing and fulsome type.

It was some time before the poor girl could contrive to make people understand that the subject was too painful a one for her to discuss, but she could scarcely fail to note how the murmuring voices died away on her entrance, and the air with which Miss Duval would pass the bread at breakfast, or the salt at dinner, was pregnant with condolence which was positively exasperating. To get away from a state of affairs that threatened to worry her out of her senses was her only inducement in deciding to accept Madame Saurien's invitation.

“Who is she, papa, and why does she invite me?” she asked, not unnaturally, seeing that she

had never before even heard of the lady in question.

"She is an old and valued friend of mine," answered Mr. Alwyn with a good deal of pomposity in his manner, "and has been a widow for some six or eight years. She has, I believe, no family, and if you will only make yourself necessary and indispensable to her, my dear child, there is no knowing to what extent this visit will be extended."

"You talk exactly as if you were sending me away from you for ever," cried Joan, with great tears starting to her eyes.

Mr. Alwyn took up the newspaper and vouchsafed no reply. Joan was really becoming very irritable and petulant. It was high time that she had an establishment of her own, and a husband to look after her.

Now it was not to be supposed that Joan and her lover had not written constantly to each other during the week or ten days that had elapsed

since they parted. Frank had received many pathetic little epistles assuring him of Joan's never dying love, and her willingness to wait any length of time for him. She did not seek to hide from her lover the fact that Mr. Alwyn had refused to sanction either engagement or intimacy between them.

Mr. Thurston was not long in coming to the conclusion that it would be advisable to run over to Boulogne with as little delay as possible, and have a personal interview, but when he heard of Joan's proposed visit to Paris, he made up his mind that it was hardly worth while to cross the Channel, since she would not be at Boulogne to greet him. Mr. Alwyn, for his part, not having heard from or seen the young man, jumped at the erroneous conclusion that he had accepted the ultimatum as final.

Madame Saurien occupied a magnificent establishment on the Boulevard Haussmann. Joan was perfectly dazzled with all the pomp and glitter,

and felt herself sadly out of place for the first few days. Truth to tell, all this show and magnificence actually depressed her. But by-and-by she began to take some degree of pleasure in her surroundings. The splendid carriage in which they were driven to the Bois, the dainty glitter of silver and glass, the luxurious fauteuils, the wealth of flowers, the softly stepping men-servants, ever at her elbow to supply a want—she had been less than woman if they had not appealed to her.

Joan was a true daughter of Eve, and when Madame Saurien expressed a wish that she should permit Pingat to see what he could make for her in the way of a walking costume, her eyes sparkled, and she accepted the offer gratefully. One thing led to another. The costume was a success, and then it was necessary to have an evening frock, and here Pingat surpassed himself. Joan could scarcely recognize the fact that the exquisitely modelled form in rich laces and

dainty silks was her own. Few people believe now-a-days in the old theory of beauty unadorned. On the contrary, most of us hold that a beautiful woman is fairer to look upon when Art and Science have lent their aid to perfect her appearance.

Mr. Alwyn, who accompanied his daughter to Paris, only remained there two days. In answer to his hostess' pressing invitations to stay, he pleaded that a life of pleasure would unfit him for the monotony of his existence, and thus it was that he preferred to return.

From her father's bearing towards Madame Saurien, Joan came to the conclusion that at one time there had been passages of a warmer nature between them. Madame Saurien had doubtless been remarkably pretty in her youth—she had some remnants of beauty even now, but the use of powders and rouges and cosmetics had had a sadly deteriorating effect upon her once fine skin, and her eyes had lost their fire. She was a

popular woman in Society. There were many reasons for this. In the first place, she was extremely wealthy. Secondly, she was a most amusing companion. And when a woman is rich, and at the same time possesses such a fund of ready wit and repartee as did Madame Saurien, there will always be plenty of tuft-hunters and toadies to swell her train. Madame Saurien was as vain as a peacock and as greedy as a young girl of admiration and flattery, and it is needless to say that she experienced but little difficulty in finding people ready and willing to pander to her weaknesses. Before Mr. Alwyn left Paris, he took his "dear friend Eugénie" into his entire confidence, and poured into her sympathetic ear the story of Joan's ill-fated love.

Madame Saurien looked grave. Here was an obstacle in the way of Joan's advancement in life which promised to be serious.

"I wish you had been frank with me at first," she said, with rather an aggrieved air, "because

then I might have acted differently." She was beginning to think that a love-lorn maiden would in all probability bore her extremely. But she was in the main kind-hearted, and Joan's pale face interested her.

"Is the young man likely to follow her here?" she asked.

"Heaven forbid!" cried Mr. Alwyn. "No, there is no fear of that. Joan gave me a solemn promise that she would not see him without my permission."

Madame Saurien had very little faith in promises of that kind. She certainly would not have considered them binding upon herself when she was a girl, and like most people she was apt to judge others from the standpoint of her own excellence.

Amusement and change of air and scene did Joan a world of good. Her present life was so gay and so much at variance with that she had led at the Rue Louise that she did not ex-

perience the slightest desire to go back there before she was compelled to do so.

She soon began to feel accustomed to see herself arrayed in handsome dresses and to hear herself admired and praised, and to have men waiting their turn for the honour of a word from her. Perhaps her head was turned just a little, but not to the extent of forgetting her lover. However busy she was, she always found time to write a long letter to him, and took more pleasure in receiving his reply than in anything else in her life. But still she was not quite so forlorn and broken-hearted as when she left Boulogne—a fact to which Madame Saurien was by no means blind, and plumed herself correspondingly thereon.

CHAPTER V.

"I SHOULD very much like to know what you are thinking about, Joan."

Joan smiled. She had no intention of selling her thoughts for the proverbial penny, so she only shook her head and looked at Madame Saurien with a smile.

"Young girls don't think," remarked that lady. "They haven't brains enough. I really believe that in nine cases out of ten their minds are a blank. Some are born fortunate," pursued Madame Saurien, "and by dint of good luck more than wordly wisdom get husbands to keep them for the rest of their lives, and then they begin to think to some purpose."

"It seems to me that there are far more blanks than prizes in the matrimonial lottery," said Joan.

“Of course there are. A great many more. If a girl cannot have what she wants, she must be contented with what she can get. The worst is that what makes up the sum and substance of a happy married life is, as a rule, scouted as of no value by young girls. I am determined that you shall be a brilliant exception, Joan. I want to see you marry well—a man of sterling worth and large income; such a man, for instance, as Ezra Smith.”

“Mr. Smith!” cried Joan in dismay. “Oh, Madame Saurien, you would never advise me to marry such a man.”

“And why not, Joan?”

Joan was silent. There were so many reasons she might have urged. To begin with, she cordially detested Mr. Smith, but in the world in which she now lived one's feelings were not held of much account, being a very minor consideration when compared with wealth and position.

Ezra Smith was an Englishman, a man who

stood six feet high, with an awkward, clumsy form like a prize ox, and possessed the head of a Goliath. Nature had expended so much material over his composition, that, possibly with the view of equalizing matters, she stinted him in the matter of brains. But in Madame Saurien's eyes that was of small account, for Mr. Smith was rich—very rich. He had made his money in butter—or rather a counterfeit of the genuine article—and had taken out patents in every country in the world. Joan had accompanied Madame Saurien to an exhibition of the wonders that Mr. Smith could perform in the dairy line, and long afterwards she shuddered when she thought of that little room, empty save for the huge churn which stood in the centre of the floor, and the temperature of which was simply appalling. But that was necessary for the manufacture of the commodity. Joan watched them pour the frothy milk into the receptacle prepared for it, with a dash of salt, and then they were bidden to turn

their backs while Mr. Smith deftly removed something from the lining of his hat which he added to the fluid.

And this something was the secret—the grand secret of Ezra Smith's prosperity. He assured the ladies with an air of truth and honesty that the compound in question possessed no deleterious qualities, and indeed was of the nature of butter itself. It was, he said, absolutely free from alum or any chemical whatever, and he defied any analyst to prove to the contrary. And yet, perfectly innocuous though it was, so astonishing were its qualities that when the butter was weighed, and that weight deducted from the quantity of milk put into the churn in the first instance, it was found to have increased in proportion more than one third.

“Thus you will perceive,” said Mr. Smith, by way of explanation, “that I can afford to sell my butter at a very reduced price and still make a handsome profit out of it.”

After partaking of the sample forwarded for approval, Joan came to the conclusion that its taste was extremely nasty, and she could in no way be induced to second Madame Saurien's warm commendations. Her opinion, however, was apparently not shared by the Paris merchants, who bought it at a ridiculously small sum and sold it for what it was not—at a profit. Joan noticed with some amusement that, excellent though Madame Saurien declared it to be, it never appeared on her table except on such occasions when Mr. Smith was present.

But whatever the quality of the butter, there was no question as to the fortune that had been made out of it. Mr. Smith had netted £100,000 by his venture, and each month was adding to his hoard. Madame Saurien had made his acquaintance a month or six weeks before Joan came to the Boulevard Haussmann, and he was now a constant visitor. Generous to a fault, he looked upon money simply as a means of pro-

curing ease and enjoyment, and, as sometimes happens with a man who has had to count his sixpences, he squandered his sovereigns right royally.

But his liberality had no effect on Joan, who had disliked him from the first, and had now begun to be a little afraid of him. His face, a strange mixture of moral weakness and brute force, with its receding chin and full mouth, could never have been accounted handsome, and yet it was not altogether without a certain fascination. The big muscular hands could have crushed hers into a pulp within their grip, and an athlete might have envied the breadth of the massive shoulders and the huge limbs. But when Mr. Smith's eyes fell upon Joan, she trembled and shrank from him, his steady gaze seeming to rivet her nerves in some mysterious and painful fashion. She was unable to analyse the strange power that this man exercised over her, but a certain magnetism appeared to draw her towards him while in her soul she rebelled.

"I could never bring myself to marry him," she said decidedly.

"You are extremely unlikely ever to have the chance," returned Madame Saurien, to whom the remark had been addressed. "Men with fortunes such as Mr. Smith's can marry whom they choose, and I should think that Mr. Smith probably aspires to a Duke's daughter."

"I am sure I hope he may get her if that be the sum of his ambition. For myself—dear Madame Saurien, you have been so good to me, it seems ungenerous on my part not to tell you the whole truth—I have a lover already."

"Only one, my child! Why, at your age I had twenty."

"Ah," said Joan gravely, "I have but one."

"And is he rich?"

"No," cried the girl impatiently, "he is poor, and likely to be poor."

"And what is his occupation?"

"He is at the Bar—a struggling barrister."

“And you could coolly talk of marrying a man who has hardly enough to keep himself? Are you mad? I should hardly have supposed that you were a girl to look forward philosophically to a future of penury and privation. Your tastes seem extravagant enough. Now, my dear child, listen to me. I can have no possible motive in advising you except for your own good. Listen, and I will tell you something. When I was even younger than you are, I fell in love, or imagined that I had fallen in love. My hero was tall and handsome, and exceedingly fond of me, but all he had in the world was his profession. No, my dear,” she continued, checking Joan, who was about to speak. “What he was has no bearing on the story in any way; suffice it to say that his means were not ample enough to justify our marrying, and thus it was we parted in floods of tears, and with frantic declarations of never-dying attachment. Two years later I married Monsieur Saurien entirely by my

own wish, and my young lover, after buffeting in the world, came into the possession of a nice little property, and married also. Twenty years passed away, and we never crossed each other's paths, until a short time ago. He is now a broken-down old man, testy and irritable, and has lost nearly every penny of his fortune, and is once again at war with the world. Can you be surprised that, when I contemplate the ease and comfort that my marriage with Monsieur Saurien secured to me, I congratulate myself on what I once considered the direst calamity of my life?"

"Are you speaking of my father?" asked Joan bluntly.

Madame Saurien actually coloured beneath her rouge. "We need not enter into personal matters," she said. "I have told you my story with a purpose. Take my advice and profit by my experience."

Now that is a thing that no one ever yet did. We all believe our own case to be entirely dif-

ferent from anything that has ever happened before or will ever happen again. Nevertheless, Madame Saurien's words carried a certain weight with them. Joan was beginning to think that she was doing a foolish thing in persisting in her engagement, but it in no wise altered her determination.

Madame Saurien had expressed a wish to see the sewers of Paris, and Mr. Smith applied for permission to the Préfet of the Seine, who two or three days later forwarded a card with full instructions where to descend, with date and hour.

Joan was not in the slightest degree interested, and would gladly have stayed at home, only that Madame Saurien made a point of her being one of the party. But she was agreeably disappointed. Everything was so exquisitely clean, and so different from what she had expected.

"What a perfect network the sewers are!" she remarked to Mr. Smith, who had contrived

to get a seat next to her, as they were slowly plodding through the stream.

“Yes, I believe they extend over 700 miles and have all been constructed since 1852. The dim light is the one great objection to them in my mind, but they really are very wonderful. You have seen almost all the show places in Paris, now, Miss Alwyn.”

“I should like to see Notre Dame again, and I am never weary of the Louvre, only, unfortunately, Madame Saurien so quickly tires of looking at pictures.”

“Will you accept me as your escort?” he asked eagerly. “There is nothing I should like better.”

“I hardly know—you are very kind, but perhaps——” Joan stammered out, terribly embarrassed. Not for worlds would she have started on any expedition alone with Mr. Smith, but she scarcely liked to tell him as much.

To her great relief the party had to change

boats, and in the confusion she managed to slip into a place next to Madame Saurien, nor did she quit the shelter of that lady's wing until they had reached the Boulevard St. Michel, where they were to alight.

Dazzled by the bright sunshine after being so long accustomed to the semi-darkness of the sewers, Joan stumbled as she ascended the stone steps and must have fallen heavily had it not been for Mr. Smith's promptitude. In an instant he had caught her and bodily lifted her out of the trap-door on to *terra firma* again.

Joan felt sick and dizzy, and her face blanched with a breathless disgust that he should have dared to touch her. She could hardly utter a conventional word of thanks, and when they reached the Boulevard Haussmann she pleaded a headache, and returned to her own room, and was seen no more that day.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE is a Turkish saying that "Fate must be presently fulfilled," and probably the Destiny that shapes our ends, wholly irrespective of any action on our own part, had something to do with the fact that wherever Joan went or whatever she might do, Ezra Smith was always at her elbow, haunting her like a shadow.

Joan had now been with Madame Saurien about three months, and one day she received a letter from her lover that both agitated and surprised her.

"I hear," he wrote, "so many rumours concerning you that if it were possible I would come to Paris at once. Is it true that you have received a proposal from a wealthy Englishman, and that—forgive me, Joan, if I pain you—you are not wholly indifferent to him, and that he is

always at your side, receiving every possible encouragement from you? Joan—my Joan, write and tell me that it is not true.”

Frank Thurston was more than satisfied with the pained reply which his letter evoked. His darling was true to him, and with that knowledge he was content.

So rumour was busy already. Scandal had dared to couple their names together. Angry though Joan was she had never realised her utter helplessness until now. So long as Madame Saurien included Mr. Smith in her invitations, it was impossible for Joan to turn a cold shoulder on him. But she showed him the utmost indifference in her tone and manner and avoided him with a subtle ingenuity which appeared to be purely accidental, but was really the perfection of acting. Ezra Smith must have been very obtuse, for he seemed to see nothing. Perhaps there was something of the india-rubber ball in his composition, for he had the faculty of re-

bounding the instant the pressure was removed. Or perhaps he trusted to the efficacy of Time to bring about what he desired.

But there came a day when his patience was exhausted. It was early morning and Joan was in the salon alone, for Madame Saurien had been summoned from the room a few moments previously. Joan was considerably astonished when the door opened and Ezra Smith came towards her. Quick as thought Joan defined the entire situation. This was a ruse on the part of Madame Saurien to give this man the opportunity he sought, and she felt herself entrapped.

"You are an early visitor," she began coldly, overlooking his outstretched hand.

"But I trust I am not an unwelcome one."

Joan was silent.

Mr. Smith was not an eloquent man, and the fact that he was very much in love was not much in favour of his wooing, but somehow or other he managed to infuse into his tone and bearing a

dignity and assurance that impressed his listener against her will. He said so little about his wealth; he offered himself, his love, and his life to Joan, and he begged her to take thought before she answered him.

And although there was but one reply to his offer, Joan tried to make her rejection of it as kindly as possible.

"I am very sorry. I have tried to show you——" she said and paused, for a girl should never take a man's love for granted until it is actually offered to her.

"I would spend my life in trying to make you happy," he persisted. "I have cared for you from the first time I saw your lovely face. And my mind has become imbued with the certainty that we should come together sooner or later."

Joan shuddered. Why could she not rid herself from the extraordinary influence this man seemed to have over her? It was purely physical, but heart and brains alike seemed to fail her in

his presence, and she struggled to free herself from the hateful spell.

"I do not love you," she said at last, lifting her eyes, and challenging his with a steady gaze, although her heart beat and hammered; "therefore it is impossible that I can ever be your wife."

Now Ezra Smith had anticipated no easy victory; he was therefore not so crestfallen as many men in his position would have been.

"I have set my love upon a cast," he said to himself, "and I will stand the hazard of the die. I don't ask for your answer now," he said quietly. "Take your own time. I will be patient."

"No, no," cried Joan eagerly. "Neither months nor years can change me. I thank you for the honour you have done me, but I must decline it absolutely."

"Then there is someone else?"

A wave of colour dyed Joan's cheek. "Yes," she said softly, "there is someone else."

Ezra Smith stood silent for the space of several moments, his eyes riveted on the shamed, down-bent face.

"It will be more difficult than I thought," he was telling himself, "but I will win her yet."

"You will not allow this to make any break in our lives?" he said at last. "Things can go on all the same?"

"Yes," answered Joan, "nothing need be changed, but you must put this thought away from you at once and for ever. That is understood; is it not?"

Mr. Smith answered with a smile. And then Joan bent her head and without so much as a touch of his hand passed from the room.

When Madame Saurien learnt what had taken place she was so angry that for once in her life she allowed her temper to get the better of her, and said such extremely hard things that Joan rebelled.

"When Mr. Smith informed me of the com-

pliment he was purposing to pay you—a portionless, penniless girl,” she cried, hotly, “I never dreamt for a moment that you could carry your ridiculous sentimentality to such a pitch as to refuse him. It positively takes my breath away. It does indeed. You are a wicked, ungrateful girl, Joan, and all my kindness and interest in your welfare have evidently been thrown away.”

“No one has a right to dictate to me in so grave a matter as marriage,” replied Joan. “I am sorry you should think me ungrateful; believe me, I am not, but it is quite impossible that I could marry Mr. Smith.”

“Idiocy—sheer idiocy!” cried Madame Saurien. “I have a great mind to send you home to your father; it would only be what you deserve.” And then Joan rose from her chair, hot and defiant.

“It is a pity,” said she, “that Mr. Smith should have considered it advisable to take you into his confidence before he ascertained my feelings in the matter; but as he has done so, and

you resent my conduct so strongly, there is but one course for me to pursue. I shall return to Boulogne this afternoon."

And Joan was as good as her word. A little afraid at the result of her violence, Madame Saurien tried to make amends, but Joan was resolute. Go she would, and go she did.

It was a very cold kiss the two women exchanged at parting. Joan was still very resentful, longing to shake the dust of Madame Saurien's dwelling from off her feet, and wishing with all her heart that she had never left her father. All the gifts that had been lavished upon her she left behind, from the handsome dresses down to the large ostrich fan purchased and presented to her the day before by Madame Saurien.

It was late in the evening when Joan reached Boulogne. Mr. Alwyn was just thinking of going up to his own room when Joan's voice on the stairs caused him to start and turn round, and the next moment she was beside him. Poor

child! her heart was full to overflowing, and she fell on her knees by her father's chair and burst into tears.

"Good Heavens! What is the matter? Why are you here? Is Madame Saurien with you?"

But it was some minutes before Joan could speak.

"Get up," cried Mr. Alwyn, testily. "At any moment we may be interrupted. You know perfectly well that cat, Duval, is all ears. Do sit down, for goodness' sake, and explain yourself."

Was this the welcome that she had longed for? Joan's heart sank lower and lower. Tremblingly she tried to find words and, in a halting fashion, strove to tell her tale. Sterner and graver grew Mr. Alwyn's face as he listened.

"And you mean to tell me that you have been sent home in disgrace!" he said at last. "That you have refused an offer such as—— Well, there, Joan, you are a born fool. No, don't

talk to me any more, I am in no mood to stand it. To-morrow I may give you my opinion of your conduct."

"I think you have said quite enough," cried Joan—stung into self-justification. "I have yet to learn that it is a crime to refuse to marry a man whom I do not love. I—I— oh, father," she continued, stretching her arms out towards him, "have you not one kind word for me?"

"Not until such time as you come to your senses." And so saying, Mr. Alwyn rose from his chair and left his daughter alone. With white face and miserable heart she sat motionless for some little time, and then she crept up-stairs to her own room.

The days that followed were anything but pleasant ones. Mr. Alwyn preserved an injured silence, which was more exasperating than hard words could have been. The ladies in the house, and even Madame Blanche herself, who, as a rule, was good nature personified, looked at her

with dubious glances. Joan was as thoroughly wretched as a girl could be. That Madame Saurien had written to her father she knew, but he had not communicated the contents of the letter to her. "I don't suppose it will be very pleasant reading," she reflected. Life in the Rue Louise was even more squalid than its wont—at least so it seemed to Joan, whose eye had accustomed itself to the luxury of the surroundings in the Boulevard Haussmann, and who sorely missed them now. Everything was so dingy, everything was so dirty. There was a poverty-stricken aspect about the place which was terribly depressing, and, the boarders being but few, the meals were insufficient and extremely badly cooked. "I cannot keep a *cordon bleu* in my kitchen," Madame Blanche used to say, "at the prices I am compelled to charge."

And then, as the crowning touch to her miseries, came a letter from Joan's lover. Mr. Thurston was greatly displeased. From what

Joan herself told him, she had allowed things to progress so far that she had actually had an offer of marriage from another man. Hitherto Frank had always felt sure of her loyalty, and had believed her to be altogether superior to the ordinary young woman's desire to extract admiration wherever she could. He was bitterly disappointed, and frankly said as much.

If Mr. Thurston could have had any conception of the effect this letter would have had upon Joan, he would have hesitated before sending it. But it was written on the spur of the moment when he was feeling sore and aggrieved.

It cut Joan to the heart, for at least she had felt certain of sympathy from her lover. She scorned to defend herself, and when the days went by and no letter reached the young man he began to feel a little uncomfortable. Had he been too harsh? "I ought not to have sent that letter," he thought. "I wish I had not been in such a hurry."

One evening as Joan came wearily upstairs with a bunch of poppies in her hand, which she had bought in the market, she found the salon, as she thought, empty, and was turning away when a burly form rose from the sofa at the end of the room and came towards her. And to her astonishment she saw that it was Mr. Smith.

What was he doing here? What could possibly be his motive in coming to the Rue Louise? Joan sat down suddenly with a little gasp.

"You have been ill!" he said; "How pale you are!"

"No. I am quite well, it was such a surprise to find you here."

"Did you not know that I should come, Joan? Did not your heart tell you that I could not keep away, my darling?" And then a wonderful thing happened. Joan found the strong arms around her and made no effort to release herself. There was a noise as of rushing water

in her ears, and a mist before her eyes, and the dulness of death stealing over her senses, and she slipped from his hold and fell, as one dead, at his feet.

* * * * *

“You love my daughter and wish to marry her?” asked Mr. Alwyn, looking into his companion’s face with a good deal of surprise and admiration at the dogged obstinacy displayed by Joan’s suitor.

“I intend to marry her, sir,” said Mr. Smith. “Neither an angel from heaven nor a devil from hell would turn me from my purpose.”

Mr. Alwyn looked a little uncomfortable and fidgeted in his chair.

Joan was in bed, and Madame Blanche was sitting beside her. There had been some talk of sending for a doctor, but Mr. Alwyn had ridiculed the idea, knowing that his purse-strings must be opened in such a case.

“A mere fainting-fit—she will be all right presently,” he said; and they carried the insensible girl upstairs, and in a little time the anxious father’s heart was relieved by the news of his daughter’s recovery.

When Joan made her appearance on the following morning, white and shaken, but otherwise much the same as usual, she found her father and Mr. Smith sitting together chatting amicably over the morning papers. Mr. Alwyn looked up as she entered, but before he could speak, Ezra Smith rose from his chair and walking straight up to Joan, took both her hands in his and kissed her forehead. And after that there was no more to be said, and Joan yielded to the fate that was too strong for her.

Nothing could exceed Mr. Alwyn’s delight; indeed his joy knew no bounds. He talked of his love for his child, and the wrench it would be to part with her, until not only did he impress all who heard him with a sense of his

paternal devotion, but he actually very nearly deceived himself.

When Joan came down to pour out her father's tea a few days later, by her plate lay a letter, and a glance told her that it came from Frank. Mr. Alwyn, ever on the watch, lest for the second time his sanguine expectations should be doomed to an untimely end, put forth his hand.

"My dear, it would be better that you should not open that epistle," he said persuasively. "I will return it myself. When a disagreeable thing has to be done, it is always advisable to get it over as quickly as possible."

Perhaps her father was right, thought Joan, and she allowed him to drop Frank's letter into his pocket without a word of dissent. The girl's whole nature seemed to have undergone a change. She felt absolutely indifferent to anything that might happen, and her heart seemed frozen

within her; she was no longer capable of feeling either sad or angry. She allowed herself to drift without so much as putting out a hand to save herself. The marriage was fixed for the 3rd of October. Mr. Alwyn arranged everything to his entire satisfaction, wholly independent of Joan, who never expressed the slightest wish as to anything. Madame Saurien wrote four pages of congratulation, ending with a proposal that the ceremony should take place from her house, and speaking of the pleasure it would give her if Mr. Alwyn would allow her to provide the wedding-breakfast.

For the first and only time Joan asserted herself. "Nothing would induce me to go to Paris," she said decidedly. "I should be glad, papa, if you would answer this letter of Madame Saurien's, and say whatever is polite and kind, only let there be no mistake about it. I wish to be married at the English church here, and there will be neither breakfast nor honeymoon. We

shall go to London by the mid-day boat, and begin our life together there."

"Of course it must be as you wish, Joan," answered her father, who was by no means pleased, for he would have dearly liked the *éclat* of a Parisian wedding, the cost of which would fall on someone else's shoulders, but since Joan was determined, it was useless to argue the matter.

Mr. Smith, on the other hand, thought his *fiancée's* decision a very wise one, and was intensely relieved that there was to be no fuss. He was more desperately in love with Joan than ever. For nearly a fortnight he remained at the Hôtel des Bains, spending the greater part of his time at the Rue Louise. But Joan soon got tired of this, and at last told her father that if she was to be tormented morning, noon, and night she would not be married at all. Upon this, Mr. Alwyn judged it prudent to make a communication to his son-in-law elect, and Mr.

Smith reluctantly accepted the hint given him and returned to Paris.

Almost every day something in the shape of a gift arrived for Joan. Such jewels that in her wildest moments the girl had never hoped to possess were crowded upon her. Mr. Alwyn was moved almost to tears at the prodigal liberality Mr. Smith displayed, but Joan hid his presents away, and for all the use they were to her she might just as well have been without them.

Rapidly the days passed by until the evening of the one before that fixed for the wedding. Mr. Alwyn had gone to the Hôtel des Bains to welcome his son-in-law and to explain to him the arrangements for the next day. Joan had flatly refused to see the man who was so soon to be her husband until they met before the altar, and fearful that at the last moment a malignant Fate might interpose, Mr. Alwyn had determined not to press the point.

The house was very quiet. The front door opened and shut, and steps came slowly up to the salon, steps which with a beating heart Joan recognised. She sprang from her chair, her eyes fixed on the floor.

"You!" she cried.

"Yes, it is I—the man you have jilted."

Joan flung her hands before her face. He might have spared her this. But Frank Thurston was lost to all sentiments of generosity. He could think only of himself and of the utter shipwreck this woman had made of his life, and his words stung her like the lash of a whip.

"Why have you done this wicked thing?" he cried at last. "Do you love this man?"

"No." Joan's lips formed the monosyllable almost inaudibly.

"And you will dare to go to the altar to-morrow and swear to love and honour him? Joan, it must not be! Do you know—have you thought what you are doing? Can you realise it?"

My God! Are you indeed the girl whom I loved and who confessed her love for me? It seems impossible. I could curse the poverty that has come between us and the wealth that has robbed me of you. But be well assured that it will bring no happiness with it, Joan—it cannot do so.”

“Hush, you are unjust. Frank, listen to me. I am not the mercenary woman you think me. I loved you and I would have waited for you, but when you lost your faith in me, my love died out, and then somehow I felt I did not care what became of me, and now——”

“I will win back that love, my darling. For pity’s sake don’t tell me that it is too late.”

Joan shook her head. “You must forget me as I will strive to forget you,” she said sadly. “God knows I shall endeavour to do my duty to my husband. Love and I have shaken hands and parted for evermore. One can live one’s

life without a warmer sentiment than friendship, I suppose?"

"Such a woman as you are, Joan, could not do so. Have pity on yourself. What will your life be worth if it must lack the one thing needful? Do not believe that money will make up for the want of love. It never has done so yet and it never will."

The tears were streaming down Joan's face. "Go," she said in broken accents. "For pity's sake go."

"Joan, if a day should ever come when you look back to this moment with regret, and when you stand in need of the love that you now wantonly fling away, remember that it is yours still. God bless you, dear." And he was gone.

* * * * *

The wedding was over and the bride and bridegroom were on their way home. Mr. Alwyn could hardly believe in the realisation of his cherished hopes. Joan was married and off his

hands, and his son-in-law was a wealthy man. It would not be long before he, too, took flight.

"There will be nothing to keep me in Boulogne," he said with an elaborate assumption of frankness, "now that I am alone."

"And what do you propose to do?" asked his son-in-law, falling into the trap laid for him.

"If it were not for the heavy expenses which my daughter's marriage has entailed upon me, expenses which for the moment seriously cripple me, I should go to Paris, where I have many friends who would gladly welcome me among them, but—as it is——" An expressive shrug of the shoulders filled up the hiatus.

Mr. Smith was a man of few words. Had Mr. Alwyn suggested London as his head-quarters he might scarcely have swallowed the bait so greedily. As it was, it seemed to him the most desirable state of affairs that Joan's father should take up his residence in a city where he was

likely to remain. Therefore, without more ado, he wrote a cheque and presented it to Mr. Alwyn.

"You will allow me to have the pleasure of paying for Joan's *trousseau*," he said cordially.

And when Mr. Alwyn perceived that the cheque was for £500 he found it necessary to wipe his eyes and with quite a husky voice murmur his acknowledgment.

Joan's beauty had turned up trumps after all.

CHAPTER VII.

JOAN'S life was not altogether unhappy. There were even times when she told herself that she might have done worse. Ezra Smith was devoted to his young wife, and, indeed, honestly proud of her, grudging her nothing that money could purchase, and lavishing upon her every possible luxury. Had she never known a higher order of happiness, she would probably have been content. The *ménage* in Park Lane was quoted by mothers anxious for their daughters to go and do likewise as a typical English home—the perfection of conjugal peace and happiness.

But in the second year of Joan's married life Ezra Smith lost a considerable sum of money in an unlucky speculation, and when on the top of this a rival in the patent butter scheme appeared

on the horizon, things began to look very serious; indeed a new company was started, a company which produced a better article at a lower price.

Mr. Smith began to feel extremely uneasy. He had made a large hole in the capital, and used to be half afraid to think what that unlucky speculation in the Croesus Copper Mine had cost him, and if there was to be no longer a steady income coming in from the sale of his butter he felt he would be seriously embarrassed.

Now Mr. Smith had an only sister named Malvina, who was a very important personage indeed, at any rate in her own estimation. She was a lady of uncertain age and possessed a temper to match, and she did not approve of her brother's marriage. She lived in Bayswater, and although that locality was entirely one of her own choosing, she never ceased to abuse it and to deplore the fact that as Ezra now had a wife she was debarred from keeping house for him. As a matter of fact, there was very little

love lost between brother and sister, and it is extremely doubtful if Mr. Smith had remained single all his life whether Malvina would ever have been invited to act as mistress of his household. Still the lady never ceased harping on this one theme, and in a manner so irritating to Joan that at last she was more often out than in when Miss Smith paid a visit to Park Lane.

The fact that Ezra was losing money was gall and wormwood to Malvina; she was dependent on her brother, and every penny she had in the world he gave her. Thus it happened that the first intimation Joan had of money troubles came from her sister-in-law.

"It is incredible to me," cried Malvina, with a toss of her head which was as insolent as she dare make it, "it is incredible to me the amount of money you and my brother manage to spend. I am sure I don't see that your house is different to the houses of half a dozen people I could mention, people who have not a tenth part of

your income. I am afraid, Joan, you will never learn to get twelve pennies'-worth out of a shilling."

"Luckily it does not much signify," said Joan, smiling with the comfortable conviction that Mr. Smith was blessed with this world's goods, and that the days of penury and economy were among the things relegated to the past.

Malvina stared at her. "I should have imagined," she remarked icily, and with emphasis on each word, "that you would now, at least, have been eager to amend the error of your ways, and try to save your husband's purse."

"But why should I?" asked Joan bluntly.

"Do you mean to say you don't know. Is it possible that my brother has to come to me for sympathy and advice, and that his wife is ignorant of his numerous losses?" And as she spoke the old spinster grasped either arm of the chair in which she sat.

“I really fail to understand what you mean,” said Joan haughtily. “If Mr. Smith had anything he wished to say to me I presume he would say it, and I decline to receive information from any other source.”

“But you must and shall hear,” almost screamed Malvina. “I tell you that your weak extravagance has ruined Ezra, and Heaven only knows what will become of you both.”

At this moment the door opened and Mr. Smith walked in.

“If I did not know that such a thing were impossible I should have imagined that you ladies were quarrelling,” he remarked pleasantly; and then, looking from Malvina’s flushed cheeks to his wife’s cold, proud face, he added, “Surely nothing is wrong?”

“I was suggesting to Joan that——” began Miss Smith awkwardly.

Joan rose precipitately and left the room, and

Malvina had an uncomfortable quarter-of-an-hour at the hands of her brother, and went away with her cheeks tingling unpleasantly at the recollection of some very plain speaking indulged in by Mr. Smith.

"Confound her officiousness; I wish she'd attend to her own business and leave mine alone," said he before he went upstairs to his wife's room.

Joan hardly looked up as he entered. She knew that he had come to explain and apologise, but she hardened her heart against him. In what one point of duty had she failed that she should be shut out from his confidence? If Joan had loved her husband there would have been less room for pride and wounded feelings. As it was she listened coldly and with an affectation of indifference that positively made him furious. Try as he might, he could never break down the granite wall that reared itself between them, and he stood impatiently.

Two years from the date of their marriage Joan's boy was born, and all the love of her hungry heart she lavished upon her child, grieved that he should belong to anyone besides herself, and almost grudging the deep affection that his father bore to him. She would have liked to have wrapped her arms round him and carried him to the ends of the world, where no hands but her own should ever touch him.

Ezra was proud of his child. As his love grew less for the cold, unsympathetic woman he had married it centred itself upon his son's life, and never was a babe so worshipped and idolized as was little Cedric. He was a beautiful child, with the sweetest smile, as his mother thought, that she had ever seen. Malvina, too, looked more graciously upon her brother's wife since she had become Cedric's mother, though the relations between them, notwithstanding, were still strained.

When Joan's boy was nearly a year old, Ezra

Smith had a serious illness from which he never wholly recovered.

He was not so temperate as he ought to have been. Truth to tell, luck was against him; everything he touched came to grief. And when he lost heavily, he drank hard that he might forget his losses. When he came home, as he too often did, the worse for drink, Joan locked her door. She would not allow him to come near her; she determined that she, at least, would be respected, if her husband did not respect himself. Joan's conduct rendered her husband almost desperate. "A pretty thing if a man may not do as he likes in his own house!" said he.

"I have no objection to your drinking more than is good for you," answered Joan, "if that is your idea of happiness, but I distinctly refuse to receive you in my apartments while you are in a state of intoxication." And her scorn did more to sober him than anything else.

Presently Ezra conceived the wild idea that

Joan was not faithful to him. It was not natural, he argued, that so beautiful a woman should be absolutely without warmth or feeling. Of course she must have a lover. And then he spent weeks in watching her movements and even condescended to question the servants as to the visitors she received and the hours she spent away from home. But he discovered nothing, for the simple reason that there was nothing for him to discover.

Joan could have smiled, only that her heart ached too sadly. She was not a woman to whom evil appealed. Her husband's honour would always be safe in her keeping. The only man who had ever stirred her soul or made her pulse beat with a pleasurable emotion was he whom she never thought to see again, the man whom she had put out of her heart and life the day she became Ezra Smith's wife.

She was thinking of him as they drove slowly down Bond Street, one lovely afternoon in May,

wondering what he had made of his life, if he were married, if he were happy, and then suddenly she saw him before her. His hand was raised to his hat as if in hesitation, as if he were not quite sure.

Joan coloured painfully. But it was all over in an instant, the horses made a sudden plunge forward, she tried to bow and smile, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Someone you know, my dear?”

“Oh, one knows so many people,” said Joan evasively, but her face was still warm with colour and Mr. Smith was in no way deceived.

Of course this little incident went to confirm his suspicions. Clearly his wife had her secrets, and he made up his mind that it should be his business to find out what they were.

One night he came home in a villainous humour, not tipsy, but having had just enough drink to make him quarrelsome.

"I have made my will," he began, in a blustering tone.

Joan made no reply.

"Would you like to know where my money goes—what is left of it?" he asked with an oath.

"If you care to tell me, I am ready to listen to you."

Ezra mimicked her tone. "I will bet a dollar you could not guess," said he, as he flung himself beside her. "If you had made things in any way pleasant for me I would not have been so hard upon you, for you are a devilish fine woman, but——"

"Do you wish to insult me?" cried Joan, as she drew herself away from his embrace with an air of disgust that was all that was needed to fire the train.

"I have left every penny to my son and £100 a year to you for life, so long as you

remain unmarried. Come, Joan, I think you will acknowledge that we are quits."

"I wish for nothing at your hands," cried his wife haughtily. "If God would be so good as to rid me of you, I would gladly work for my living. I loathe you, Ezra Smith, and I despise myself even more than I despise you. It is marvellous how I could ever have brought myself to marry you, and if it were not for my boy, I——"

"Your boy!" he echoed, and it would be difficult to describe the amount of contempt the enraged man contrived to put into the words, "he is my boy, my own flesh and blood, unless——"

It needed but this. Joan rose and faced him.

"You coward!" she said, in a low, concentrated voice, "you miserable coward. Not content with making my life the hell it is, you would cast a slur upon my character. For your words to-night I will never forgive you."

Within a fortnight the house in Park Lane was empty.

Mr. Smith had a large rambling old place close to Blackheath, and he removed his family there. He gave no reason for what he did, and there was nothing for it but to acquiesce silently. Joan shuddered when she saw the house that was to be henceforth her home. It was like a prison, she thought, with its double row of windows and its weed-grown paths. It was dreary and desolate to a degree, and when the gates that opened into the lane were fast closed the high wall that bordered the grounds rendered it impossible for anyone inside to see out, or anyone from the outside to disturb the privacy that reigned within.

"One might be murdered and comfortably disposed of, and nobody be any the wiser," said Joan, in an unguarded moment, to Nurse Thacker.

"Good Lord, mum, don't you be for saying such things." The woman crossed herself de-

voutly. "What I am thinking of is whether the nurseries is damp. I don't like the look of them I must confess."

From the moment that Joan set her foot upon the threshold of her new house, she felt herself a prisoner. She was allowed no society, and saw no one from week's end to week's end.

"I am too poor to entertain," urged Mr. Smith when Joan appealed to him. "You must find amusement for yourself."

Even her carriage was gone. It had been sold, at least so said Mr. Smith.

At last, in her extremity, Joan thought of her father, and wrote him a long account of all that had occurred, begging him to come and judge for himself of the life she was doomed to lead. And this letter she took the precaution to post herself.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. ALWYN was still in Paris, and rumour said that if Madame Saurien would only consent to cast in her lot with his, in all probability he would not much longer be a widower. But the lady in question, like the great majority of her sex, was rather coy, and matters were not much further advanced when last he had paid a visit to his daughter. Twice, and twice only, since her marriage, had Joan's father received an invitation to London, and on neither occasion had his son-in-law (as he himself expressed it, when discussing the situation with an old friend at the Union Club) come up to the scratch. In other words, he had found it absolutely impossible to borrow any money from him. His demand upon each occasion had been modest in the extreme.

"£500 is all I want, my dear fellow, and you shall have it back when I get my dividends. You shall, indeed, upon my word of honour."

But the old gentleman's promises and his reference to his honour had failed to make the slightest impression on Mr. Ezra Smith.

"My dear Alwyn," he had remarked, "when I married your daughter I had not the faintest intention of supporting you into the bargain. It is best that I should tell you this frankly. On more than one occasion I have assisted you, but you must not take this as a precedent."

Mr. Alwyn had seriously resented this treatment. "I am sorry to observe," he said to his daughter, "how coarse your husband is becoming. Indeed, he absolutely lacks the courtesy that is due from one gentleman to another."

"I do not think you ought to ask Ezra for money, papa," replied Joan. "He has been very generous to you already."

"Don't talk nonsense, my dear child. What

are a few hundreds to a man like your husband? —a mere flea-bite. But, after all, I prefer not to discuss the subject. I am a true philosopher, my dear Joan, and so long as you have everything you want, and I am sure that you are living a life of luxury and ease, I can content myself with my humble little apartment, and ask for nothing beyond.”

And then Joan had opened her jewel-box and taken out two £10 notes, for which she declared she had no use whatever. Mr. Alwyn took them and placed them carefully in his pocket-book, but he scarcely gave his daughter a word of thanks, and, indeed, felt himself considerably aggrieved that the pigeon, her husband, refused to be plucked.

The days went by, and Joan received no answer from her father, a circumstance which appeared to her to be extremely strange.

“Nothing for me?” she asked one day as

Mr. Smith unlocked the box in the hall, and glanced at its contents.

"No. I did not know you had any correspondents."

"I have been expecting a letter from my father," she said, and her lip quivered a little.

"Oh, I really forgot to tell you. I had a letter from him a day or two ago. By the way, Joan, be kind enough to remember for the future that this house is mine, and the guests will only come here by my invitation. Do you understand?"

"And you refuse to receive my father?"

"Most distinctly."

"As you say, the house is yours, and you must do as you think proper. But mark my words, you will be sorry one day for the way in which you have treated me."

If Ezra Smith hoped to break his wife's spirit and force her into a semblance of affection for

himself, he reckoned without his host. Joan would not even let him have the satisfaction of seeing how cruelly she suffered. But we all have our vulnerable points, and Joan had hers. Through her darling boy, this man had power to wound her to the quick, and as Cedric reached his third year, his unhappy mother was kept perpetually on the rack. He was a nervous, sensitive child, and highly excitable. She had to be most judicious in her training of him. Only Nurse Thacker knew to the full extent what Master Cedric's temper was, though Joan could not fail to see that he was wilful and passionate. When thwarted, he would fling himself upon the floor, and scream until he was black in the face.

Once when a scene of this sort occurred, Joan felt that chastisement was necessary, and, dearly as she loved the boy, prepared to inflict it, but to her astonishment, the old nurse flung herself between them.

"For God's sake, mum, don't lay a finger on

the child," she cried, and rose from her knees trembling in every limb.

"Nurse, I am ashamed of you," said Joan sternly. "Would you encourage the child you profess to love in his naughtiness?"

"May be he cannot rightly help himself, mum."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"His father, mum, was just the same. Many and many's the time I've seen him foam at the mouth with rage, but we weren't never allowed to check him."

"I never heard of such folly in my life," cried Joan. "Remember, Cedric, that if ever again you give way to your temper in this way, I shall punish you."

But as she spoke, her heart smote her, and she felt how hard it would be to keep her word. The fit was over, and the sweet childish face with its magnificent eyes was upturned fearlessly to her own.

She caught him to her and kissed him passionately. Her heart was starved for love, and little Cedric had come straight from Heaven itself, as it seemed to poor desolate Joan, to comfort her, and thus it was that her life was bound up in that of the child.

Joan had never been a religious woman, in the common acceptation of the term, but something new was stirred to life within her when the downy head nestled upon her bosom, and for almost the first time in her life she prayed that she might become a better and a worthier woman, for her dear boy's sake.

"Nurse Thacker is really a ridiculous old woman," she told herself as she left the nursery. "I must not let her spoil my darling; it is a mistake to engage servants who have been in the same family for years, and yet there is no doubt that she is devoted to the child."

So lonely was Joan's life, that when her husband announced one morning at the breakfast-

table that his sister would arrive in the course of the day and would probably remain a week with them, she was genuinely pleased. Not that she liked Malvina one whit more than she had done in the past, but when one has not a soul to exchange a word with but the servants, anything in the way of variety is agreeable.

Miss Smith brought her oldest dresses and her most condescending manner with her. She talked incessantly of "my poor brother" and "dear Ezra's trials," until at last Joan asked her point-blank if she imagined that anybody in that house was living a life of felicity.

"But Ezra has so little merited his fate," pursued Malvina.

"I suppose you consider that I deserve anything that may happen to me? If so, I am really very grateful for your good opinion; but let me tell you this, that if I had never married, I should have been a very much happier woman than I am to-day."

"It is not a fair test to rail against matrimony," said Malvina firmly. "Many a lawful marriage is an infamous wrong."

"I do not care what your opinions on the subject may be; you have not tried it. I have and I know."

"You are a wicked woman," cried Malvina, aghast at this rank heresy. "After the immoral sentiments you have just uttered, I should not be surprised at anything."

And the old spinster really meant what she said.

She hated Joan more than ever, unjustly laying to her charge the misfortunes that had befallen her brother—misfortunes which had considerably reduced her own income. Malvina was like many other people in the world—where her purse was touched she found it very hard to forgive.

"I can't see why you dislike Engledean so much," she remarked, the day before she left;

"the house is charming, so roomy, so deliciously old-fashioned, with its wide window-seats and its quaint window-panes."

"You see there is considerable difference between paying a visit here once in a while and living your whole life in the place," answered Joan drily. "I very much doubt whether you would like it any better than I do, if you were compelled to see as much of it as I am."

At that moment a child's shrill scream was heard. Joan dropped her work and ran to the door.

Some few days before, Mr. Smith had announced his intention of teaching his son to ride. Joan had objected on the ground that the little fellow was much too young. "His is a highly nervous temperament," she said, "and at his age I look upon it as a most dangerous experiment. A few years later I will give my willing consent; I want my boy to be a manly boy and to learn

and know everything that a man should know. But there is time for all this and we had better wait."

"I shall do as I please in the matter," Mr. Smith had answered, and after that there was nothing more to be said. The matter had entirely escaped Joan's recollection until now.

With a feeling of unspeakable dread at her heart she crossed the hall just in time to see Phœbe, Mr. Smith's mare, set off at a canter up the drive, with poor little Cedric strapped to the saddle. The child uttered scream after scream, almost driving Joan wild. Gathering up her skirts, she flew over the gravel path to a point where the animal must of necessity turn, and caught hold of the bridle. Phœbe stood perfectly still. She seemed to know that she had in some way misconducted herself, and allowed Joan to untie the silken sash that bound the little figure to its seat. With a gasp, Cedric fell into her arms, limp and motionless.

"Stand back," cried Joan authoritatively, as Malvina hurried to meet her.

"Oh, Joan, you ought not to have interfered. My brother will be so angry."

"I don't care a fig for his anger!" answered Joan.

At the front door stood Ezra Smith, pale with passion.

"Give me the boy," said he.

"You shall not lay a finger on him," replied his wife. "Let me pass."

"I will do as I choose with my own child. I am not going to allow myself to be dictated to by a—woman. Do you hear what I say? Put the boy down; put him down at once."

"I utterly refuse to do so."

The next instant she staggered back, for with all his force her husband had struck her full in the face.

"For Heaven's sake, dear madam, come away." It was Nurse Thacker who spoke. She pushed

Joan aside with scant ceremony and buried her sinewy arms round her master's waist, by a dexterous movement bringing him to the ground, not a moment too soon.

With a howl like that of a wild beast, the infuriated man tried to struggle to his feet, beating his head upon the tiled floor, his face swollen and purple, and his tongue protruding from his mouth. Nurse Thacker, flung herself upon him and by main force, possessing herself of both his hands tied them firmly together just below the elbow.

To Joan's surprise, her sister-in-law asserted herself in a very unexpected fashion. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the old woman could have managed so powerful a man as her master, without Malvina's assistance. Miss Smith seized the silken scarf that dangled from Joan's arm, and helped to wind it round her brother's hands.

"Now," said she, "we had better move him," and Malvina and Nurse Thacker between them

rolled the body of the prostrate man along the hall and into the library; and then the door shut and Joan was left outside.

Her mouth was cut and bleeding, and mechanically she raised her hand to it.

"Poor mamma," said Cedric, "are you hurt?"

"No, darling," she answered, unwilling to distress her little son.

"I was afraid you were," said he, and, clinging to her skirts, he followed his mother upstairs.

What new horror was this? What had happened to her husband?

More than two hours afterwards Nurse Thacker came to her room.

"I thought you were resting, ma'am, or I should have come before," she said apologetically. "I knew Master Cedric was safe." But her eyes did not meet the questioning ones riveted upon her.

Joan burst into tears. This was a sight the old woman could not bear. "No, no," said she,

"there's no need to fret, the master is himself now, and the doctor is with him."

"Nurse—dear nurse—tell me the truth. What was the matter with him?"

"They calls it a fit, but I calls it temper and drink."

"Oh, it is dreadful!" said Joan, hiding her face. "You have seen him like this before, nurse. Now don't deny it, I know you have, or you could never have acted so promptly."

The old woman passed her hand over her eyes.

"God help you, my poor lady, for there's sore trouble in store for us all," she said sadly. And then she carried Cedric away, and Joan was left to her own sad thoughts. No one summoned her to her husband's side, and she learnt that his sister was with him.

Malvina did not take her departure on the following day as had been arranged, nor did Joan see her for nearly a week. During that

time the furniture from her husband's dressing-room was removed downstairs, and, not a little to her relief, Joan found that for the future Mr. Smith would occupy a room on the ground floor, and thus she would be freed from his hateful presence.

On the third day she had an interview with Dr. Dulcimer, who was in attendance upon the invalid, but found him curiously reticent and unwilling to give her much information.

"The patient must be kept perfectly quiet," he said, "and my instructions with reference to him strictly adhered to. If this is done," he added, "I trust Mr. Smith will soon be able to leave his room."

Next evening as Joan was coming slowly downstairs, she found a strange man standing on the mat in the hall, and asked him what his business was.

"I was told to ask for Miss Smith, ma'am, and if you be that lady, I was to say that I had

come from Dr. Dulcimer to wait upon the mad gentleman." Before Joan could answer, a door behind her opened, and Miss Malvina's waspish tones made themselves heard.

"Be good enough to step this way."

The man obeyed, and Joan stood petrified with horror. Surely her ears must have played her false, there was some horrible mistake. She dragged herself into the drawing-room and flung herself upon the couch.

Perhaps, after all, Malvina had a heart, though it must have been considerably shrivelled. At all events within a few minutes she came to seek her sister-in-law, and expressed her regret that John Lawson, the keeper sent by Dr. Dulcimer, had so abruptly disclosed the truth.

"It is alas too true," she said. "My poor brother has been affected in this way ever since his birth, but after the stroke of fortune that made him a rich man, he seemed to be perfectly cured. It is six years since there has been any

outbreak—it was your unfortunate interference that caused it.”

“How could I know? How could I tell?” cried Joan. “Oh, Malvina, it is too terrible! Will he ever be himself again?”

“Dear me, yes,” said Malvina in a practical tone, “he will soon be to all appearance perfectly well. But recollect that you must never lose sight of the fact that he will be more liable to an attack now than before.”

And then the whole horror of the situation broke upon Joan. “I cannot bear it,” she cried, “to be always on the watch. It would be a living death. I must leave him. If I did not, I should go mad too. My brain reels when I think of it.”

“There is the child to be considered. You would scarcely like to leave him behind I should think.”

“My boy! Cedric! Leave him!”

“Yes, it is extremely improbable that his father would give him up.”

"God help me! what am I to do?"

"I do not see that there is anything to be done," said Malvina sternly, "but to bear your fate as many another woman has done before you; my brother is still young, and the doctors say he may be able to struggle against his malady and to live for years."

A fierce shudder shook Joan from head to foot.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE are women who can make duty—cold abstract duty—a higher law than love. But Joan was not one of these. When she looked into the future that stretched before her, a future filled with vague horrors and measureless torments, her heart failed her. Even pity itself died out, swallowed up in the unutterable disgust and abject fear which filled her whole soul. It seemed monstrous and cruel that, because she had entered into a contract with this man, she was doomed to spend her life by the side of a maniac. With every fibre of her nature she rebelled, but there seemed no escape possible. She was his wife, therefore she must accept whatever Fate chose to give her, and yield her neck meekly to the yoke.

What had their life been together even at its best? An interlacing of withering branches, a mockery of all that was holy and sacred, a travesty of love and the union of souls.

And there was no escape—none save through the channels of shame or death.

“This is man’s law and none of God’s making,” Joan told herself desperately. As she looked back, much that had been incomprehensible now became clear and easy to understand.

Ezra had not been responsible for his actions—a fevered imagination and a diseased brain had carried him beyond the limits laid down for the guidance of the sane and rational. He must not be judged by the standard of other men.

“But he had no right to marry me,” cried Joan stifling the voice of passion. “It was a dastardly thing to do.”

At the end of a fortnight Mr. Smith left his room. It was almost more than Joan could bear to see him walking about exactly as he used to

do and to note how little change there was in him.

She trembled every time he spoke to her, for she was in absolute fear of him, and her eyes followed him wherever he went. At night in her dreams she lived through it all again—the blood-shot eyes and livid face, the guttural sounds and impotent anger, the heavy thuds as his head struck the tiled floor. John Lawson was still in the house, and Dr. Dulcimer paid a daily visit, but beyond that there was nothing to remind anyone of the events of that awful night.

It vexed and irritated Ezra Smith to have his footsteps dogged. Whether or not he realised his own condition it was impossible to say, but there came a day when he refused to allow John Lawson to remain any longer, and paid him his wages and dismissed him.

Joan rushed upstairs to the nursery in a panic of fear. “Nurse, what are we to do? Is it safe to be alone with him?”

"I'm a match for him any day," cried Nurse Thacker, in a tone which brought a crumb of comfort to the poor lady. "You best just keep clear of him, it irritates him to know you're watching. You should learn to humour him, ma'am."

"Humour him! If it was not for my darling child I would pray that I might die. There is no woman so miserable on all God's earth."

The next day Joan went herself to see Dr. Dulcimer, and to question him as to the advisability of parting with John Lawson.

"My dear lady," said Dr. Dulcimer, "yours is a very sad case. I'm very sorry for you, very sorry indeed, but I don't see that anything can be done at present. Your unhappy husband is now perfectly sane, and hence has the right to discharge any servant he pleases."

"But it—it—the danger will return?"

"No, not necessarily. As I understand this is the only attack that Mr. Smith has had during

the last six or seven years. Pray let this knowledge comfort you, and, my dear lady, take a word of advice on your own account. Try not to worry so much. You are undermining your own health, and your nerves are all to pieces. Try to look at things calmly and philosophically. To bear is to conquer our fate!"

The tears welled up into Joan's eyes, and she drew her veil closely over her face, as she turned homeward.

This was in May, and early in June little Cedric fell ill. His cot was in his mother's room, and in the middle of the night Joan was awoke by his cries. In an instant she was by his side, and took him in her arms. She noticed that his face was puffy and red, and that his limbs twitched convulsively.

"Nurse," cried Joan in alarm, "come here at once!"

Almost as she spoke the nursery door opened and the old woman was at her side. In an in-

credibly short space of time hot water was ready, and the little boy plunged into it. It almost seemed as if he were dead. His head had fallen back and his lips were blue and rigid.

“Is he in convulsions?” whispered Joan.

“I pray God it may be no worse,” answered Nurse Thacker, down whose cheeks the tears were running. “Ah, he is better—see!” The tiny hands unclenched themselves, and by-and-by Cedric opened his eyes. They fell on his mother’s anxious face, but he did not seem to recognise her.

Through the long hours of the night Joan and the old servant watched by him. He would fall into a restless fitful slumber, and then wake with agonised cries and sobs, which wrung Joan’s heart. About five o’clock a messenger was sent for Dr. Dulcimer, who, when he made his appearance, expressed entire satisfaction with what had been done, ordered the room to be darkened,

administered a soothing draught, and left the two women somewhat consoled.

"Has the child been unhappy?" he asked of the nurse, and Joan thought the question strange.

"Not in the least, sir," she replied. "He is always so bright and merry, but, perhaps—I had not noticed it before—he has been a little dull and heavy the last day or two. What do you think has been the matter with him, doctor?"

"A mere childish attack, which will wear off," he answered. "God forgive me for the lie," he said to himself, as he closed the door softly; but, when he thought of the white tortured face looking into his, and the beseeching, pain-filled eyes fixed upon him, he felt that he must have been less than man to have spoken the truth.

For a day or two Cedric was languid and fretful, but after that he was himself again.

One curious feature of Ezra Smith's illness was that he rarely, if ever, asked to see his child,

and Joan was more than grateful that it was so. They kept to their own apartments as much as it was possible, the women and the boy, and, as the weather grew warm and sunny, they spent a great portion of their days out of doors. But, as the weeks wore away, little though she saw her husband, Joan could not be blind to the fact that he was not so well either in health or spirits.

One day, as she passed through the hall on her way to the garden with Cedric and his nurse, the library door burst open violently and Mr. Smith rushed out with a newspaper in his hand, gesticulating and waving it above his head.

"At last I have discovered them—tracked them—the shameless pair," he cried. "They're at Monte Carlo, my wife and her lover, and I am ruined—ruined. She only cared for me for my money; it—it's all gone!"

He flung out his arms with an indescribably pathetic gesture. Joan seized the child's hand, and drew him back behind the heavy curtain

that hung over the dining-room door, while Nurse Thacker tried to soothe the unfortunate man.

“Ah, the hussey,” she cried, “but we’ll catch her yet, Master Ezra, won’t we—you and I? Just you trust to me—Old Nana. You remember, she always helped you out of all your troubles, didn’t she now?”

And so coaxing and wheedling she managed to get him back into his room again, but before nightfall John Lawson had returned to Engledean, for Mr. Smith had another acute attack. His yells and howls could be heard from attic to basement, and Joan knelt by her boy’s cot, and buried her face in the coverlid that she might not hear.

It was always the one theme—his wife’s unfaithfulness. The poor brain had grasped that one idea, and would not part with it.

“He must be taken away,” said Joan to Dr. Dulcimer. “Surely there are hospitals”—she

could not bring herself to say madhouses—"where they would receive him?"

"Undoubtedly there are," said the doctor, "but after the attacks have passed away he is perfectly sane. It is difficult to decide what is best to be done in such a case. You see how suddenly the last seizure came on; we have not had a day's warning. However, I will make up my mind as to what had better be done, and tell you in the morning."

But the fiat had gone forth. Ezra Smith would soon cease to be a care and responsibility to anyone. Thick shawls and rugs were hung within and without the doors to deaden sound. Even Dr. Dulcimer and the famous specialist, Sir Samuel Carver, whom he had called in, shrank from the appalling scene. Three days and nights it lasted. Then there was an ominous silence, a silence more awful still.

Midnight had struck. Cedric lay sleeping peacefully, and such of the household who might

take rest were in bed. But there was no rest for Joan. Up and down the room she paced, stopping every now and then to listen. Not a sound broke the stillness. Then she opened her door and peered cautiously out. There was a bright light in the hall. Dr. Dulcimer must have gone. His hat and overcoat were missing from the stand. John Lawson was alone with his patient. Joan sat down to think.

The minutes ticked themselves away—half-past twelve—one o'clock. It was morning. Another day had dawned. And still that curious calm, that unbroken silence.

Joan could bear it no longer. In her white wrapper and slippered feet she stole noiselessly down the stairs into the hall, and crept to the door of her husband's room. And as she did so it opened.

She had only just time to hide herself, shrinking back amongst the shadows. It was Ezra Smith himself. Gaunt, haggard, his face

discoloured and drawn, his jaws dripping with saliva, and the long dark hair matted upon his forehead and pressed upon the sides of his head. He had lost all semblance of humanity, and Joan could hardly repress a cry of horror and loathing, and as he passed so closely where she stood he nearly touched her. It was a terrible situation. In this awful state her husband was at liberty to do what mischief his poor distraught brain might devise.

Joan darted through the half-open door to see John Lawson sleeping at his post. Worn-out and exhausted nature had asserted herself, and in the peaceful belief that the madman was securely pinioned and perfectly helpless, he had yielded to the sleep that had stolen over him.

Joan seized him by his shoulders and shook him vigorously.

"Wake up!" she cried; "for Heaven's sake, wake up!" Dazed, stupid, and only half comprehending, John Lawson opened his eyes. The

instant he saw Ezra's wife, he grasped the situation as if by magic. With one bound he was in the hall. Mr. Smith had entered the drawing-room and stood mouthing and muttering in the middle of the floor.

But when he saw John Lawson advancing towards him, he seized a chair, and with threatening gestures held it above his head.

"I'll dash your brains out, if you come a step further," he cried.

And knowing that the patient was perfectly capable of executing his threat, John Lawson drew back. He found it difficult to make up his mind what had better be done, for he knew that unassisted he could not cope with the maniac.

Mr. Smith walked to the mantel-shelf, and, still keeping his eye upon the man, resolved not to be taken at a disadvantage. He deliberately knocked the ornaments into the grate one by one, seeming to take a fiendish pleasure in his work. Then he overturned a small table covered

with a multiplicity of trifles, and finally went down on all fours, emitting a series of howls of the character positively fiendish.

Behind the large folding screen, which stretched across the end of the room, Joan hid herself, too paralyzed with horror to move hand or foot.

Seeing his opportunity, as the madman wheeled slowly round, John Lawson sprang upon him, and the two men rolled over and over, locked in a deadly embrace. The maniac seemed possessed of almost superhuman strength, and he bit and tore, using both teeth and nails in his efforts to free himself, and it would have fared ill with the unfortunate keeper had not at that instant the door opened and Dr. Dulcimer entered with his assistant. Now, though Dr. Dulcimer was a remarkably strong man, and his assistant far from being a weak one, it was with a good deal of difficulty that they were able to rescue John Lawson. When they had at last

succeeded in doing so, the legs of the madman were securely tied together above the knee. Foaming and gnashing his teeth he lay conquered, but it had been an awful struggle.

“How in the world did this happen?” asked Dr. Dulcimer, with a tinge of severity in his voice.

John Lawson tried to explain, with—it is needless to say—as small an amount of blame attaching to himself as possible.

“I thought you were to be trusted,” said Dr. Dulcimer, in a tone of scathing contempt. “Go and see to the straps, and look sharp. I’ll secure him myself this time.”

John Lawson left the room, and the doctor withdrew to a little distance from the patient. Now among the articles scattered over the floor was a certain poignard, given to Joan some years ago, and which she had been in the habit of using as a paper-cutter. It was a quaint and

artistic toy, and the handle was studded with uncut rubies.

With the cunning of madness the poor man's eyes sparkled and shone, and he edged his body along the soft carpet until it was within arm's reach.

The next instant he had buried it to the hilt in his bosom. A gasp—a slight choking, and then a mighty quiver of the huge form, and Ezra Smith lay still. The doctor was just in time to see him die. The whole thing was practically over in an instant.

Joan neither swooned nor uttered a cry, but stood as if turned to stone, with bloodless face and rigid lips.

"It is terrible!" cried Dr. Dulcimer, as he pulled the dagger from the wound and the warm blood spurted out over his hands. "After all, perhaps it is providential," he continued; "no doubt he might have lived for years to curse the

life of his poor young wife. I'm not sure that it isn't a happy release."

"His wife was very unhappy, I suppose?" said Dr. Dulcimer's assistant.

"Poor soul, yes. If ever a woman led a life of martyrdom she has done so, and there is worse in store for her." The assistant looked up enquiringly.

"I mean that she has a child with the face of an angel and the temper of a demon. Her life is bound up in that of her boy, and that boy has the taint of madness in his blood. Who is to tell her this? I'm sure I could not do so. The poor little fellow cannot escape—the seeds are there; indeed they have already shown themselves, and peace for her, his unhappy mother, can only last so long as she is in ignorance of the awful future that lies before her son."

"It is indeed terrible," said the assistant, "and she seems such a sweet lady. Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing whatever," said Dr. Dulcimer.

Joan heard no more. Crouching in a heap, her hands covering her face, the voices of the men were rising and falling on her ears with the dull monotony that carried neither sense nor meaning to her brain. And then they took the body away and she was alone.

CHAPTER X.

JOAN rose to her feet and stumbled forward. How she got out of that room she could never remember. She had a distinct recollection of clinging to the balustrades and dragging herself up the long staircase. It was now two o'clock. She could scarcely believe that it was only one short hour since she had stolen down, anxious and frightened, to ask for tidings of the man who now lay dead. One little hour. How strange she felt—numb and cold! Her heart seemed frozen within her.

He was dead. Her husband was dead. She had never loved him, and, to do her justice, she had never pretended to love him. Hence she had no tribute of tears to offer him. There was no room for sorrow or regret in the knowledge

that she would never see him again. Indeed, there was nothing but relief in the thought that his presence would never have power to shock or wound her any more.

What was it then—this sense of impending evil and misery which she could not throw off? She lifted her hand to her head—bewildered and puzzled. “Yes, there was something more.”

Her eye fell on the cot where slept her boy; his golden curls tossed on the pillow and his soft cheek flushed with sleep. Joan clasped her hands tightly together. Recollection had come back to her.

He cannot escape! the madman’s child—doomed to the madman’s fate. “Oh, God, if indeed thou art merciful,” cried Joan, “aid me in my hour of sore need!”

But the days of miracles are past and no angel from Heaven came down to comfort the distraught woman.

She turned with a shudder from the cot,

tracing as she did for the first time the father's image in the baby face. She had never noticed the likeness before. And she recognised the fact that as her boy grew to manhood he would resemble his father still more.

"The taint was there," the doctor had said, and no living being could check its course. And through the years to come must she sit with folded hands and watch the first signs and symptoms of the destroyer.

The awful scene she had just witnessed burnt itself in upon her brain—the struggles of the maniac and his yells and cries, which were like nothing human.

And her boy was born to like fate. It was too terrible to contemplate. There is a limit to human endurance. Joan's head drooped on her hands, and she stood trembling like a leaf in the wind, face to face with the most dire temptation of her life. Was it crime that seemed to commend itself to her?

“No, no,” she cried wildly, “it is the only justice I can do him now—the only reparation I can make.”

The little life that He had given she would give back to Him, since she was powerless to shield it from the perils of the future and the curse of heredity.

The child stirred uneasily in his sleep and with a half cry awoke.

“Mama,” he said.

Joan could not answer. Something in her throat was strangling and choking her. Her brain felt on fire, but her hand did not tremble as she selected one from a bunch of keys and unlocked a rose-wood box full of small phials. Most of them were empty, but there was one, half full of a thick brown liquid. This was what she sought. The drug had comforted and eased her more than once when she was racked with pain.

“Mama—I have not said my prayers.”

Joan's knees knocked together, and she put out her hand to steady herself. She knew that she required only one moment of courage and resolution and then there would be peace for her darling for evermore.

"I did say some," babbled the sweet voice, "and now I will say it all."

"Fain I would to thee be brought,
Dearest Lord forbid it not,
In the Kingdom of thy grace,
Give a little child a place. Amen."

"Did you say Amen, Mama?"

"Drink this, dear. It will do Cedric good."

And with unquestioning faith he drained the glass, which fell with a crash to the floor.

* * * * *

Ezra Smith and his little son lay side by side in the big guest chamber at Engledean. The blinds were drawn down and the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers. Malvina had seen to all the arrangements herself.

With streaming eyes Nurse Thacker told how when she went to rouse her mistress in the early morning she had found her sleeping tranquilly with the dead child clasped in her arms.

"She be dazed, poor thing," said she, "fair dazed."

But Malvina had formed her own conclusion on the subject. Without the slightest ceremony she walked into the room where Joan still sat.

"You are a wicked woman," she cried. "Not contented with the wreck you made of my poor brother's life, you have taken that of his child."

Joan neither moved nor spoke. She might not have heard, for all the signs she gave.

Malvina looked round the room. A bottle with a few drops of brownish fluid, and the cork beside it, caught her eye, and a rose-wood medicine-chest, with the keys still dangling in the lock, stood open on a side table.

Miss Smith promptly took possession of the box and bottle. Joan's eyes rested on her care-

lessly, but she did not make the slightest effort to restrain her.

“For God’s sake, what are you going to do, Miss?” cried Nurse Thacker, who had followed her into the room.

“I’m collecting proofs of the unnatural crime this woman has been guilty of,” replied Malvina in icy tones.

“Oh, my dear lady,” said the old woman, flinging herself at Joan’s feet, “tell me how it happened. For pity’s sake say something.”

Joan pushed away the clinging hands and frowned.

“Get up, Nurse,” said Malvina, “your tears and pity are wasted on such a hardened wretch. I know what you don’t know. She married my poor brother for his money; she led him the life of a dog, and treated him as if he were dirt beneath her feet; and now she has removed the only obstacle from her path that threatened to

deprive her of the wealth she has bartered her soul to gain."

Joan rose from her chair. "Go away," she said, "your voices trouble me. Go away!" and she pointed to the door.

Miss Malvina Smith was not a woman to allow the grass to grow under her feet. Within an hour the proofs of her sister-in-law's guilt were in the hands of the police.

Joan showed no surprise when an inspector and a constable arrived with a warrant for her arrest. She allowed Nurse Thacker to put on her bonnet and cloak, and she walked slowly out of the big gates that had closed upon her eighteen months ago.

A cab was waiting outside. She got in, and Malvina and the inspector followed her, the constable taking his place on the box beside the driver.

The journey passed in almost unbroken silence. Joan leant back in her corner and

closed her eyes wearily, apparently indifferent to or unconscious of the gravity of her position. Malvina's lips were pressed together in a straight, uncompromising line.

In vain Nurse Thacker watched and waited for the return of the poor lady. The hours wore away, and she did not come. Engledean would know her no more. She had crossed its threshold for the last time.

Malvina took her place at the head of the establishment, and a few days later explained to the trembling servants that their mistress had been committed to take her trial for the wilful murder of her child.

The news spread like wildfire. Throngs of gaping men and women assembled outside Engledean to stare up at the windows and discuss the tragedy.

In her prison cell Joan's sad head dropped on her bosom, and her slender arms clasped themselves tightly round her knees. The awful

solitude of her prison life was harder to bear than anything else—no one save the chaplain and the wardress with whom to exchange a word—no sound to break the stillness.

When her solicitor came to see her he implored her to be frank with him, and although he did not ask her point-blank if she were guilty, he begged her in her own interest to give him the fullest information.

“I feel that I’m an innocent woman,” she said, and then she hesitated, for a blank, impenetrable wall seemed to shut out the past, and her brain had lost its grasp of events. But when her mind recovered its balance, bit by bit they came back to her—came back with an agonising conviction.

“Why did I do it?” she cried, clutching Mr. Hutchinson’s arm. “Did I do it? They say I did. I don’t know.”

And then she relapsed into her former callous and apathetic state. The El Dorado of her father’s

hopes and aspirations, the wealth he had so coveted, had grown into a millstone to hang itself about his daughter's slender neck.

The Blackheath murder was the topic of the hour—not a nine days'—a month's wonder. In boudoirs and kitchens alike it was discussed. Men and women shuddered at the wickedness of this fellow-creature.

“Such a degree of moral turpitude was almost inconceivable,” they said. Truth to tell, every man's hand was turned against her.

Joan had no friends. No one knew where her father was, and, with the exception of Mr. Hutchinson, her solicitor, no one would have taken the trouble to communicate with him if they had known where a letter could find him; and the first intimation Mr. Alwyn received of the tragedy was through the newspapers. He was on the eve of his marriage with Madame Saurien, that lady having taken compassion on him at last, and Mr. Alwyn was looking forward with

delight to a snug little nest and a life of ease when the blow fell upon him.

“Great Heavens! Am I always to be tormented with that wretched girl?” he cried. “Is she to turn up at every point of my life to annihilate my schemes and projects?”

Madame Saurien had also read her newspaper, and her heart was full of an unwonted tenderness and softness when her elderly suitor paid his daily visit.

“Have you seen it?” stammered Mr. Alwyn. “Unhappy girl! She is doomed to bring misery on all around her. How can I ask you to link your life with mine now that this foul blot stains my name?”

“Pray calm yourself,” said Madame Saurien, gently. “We do not know what her temptation may have been. We must be pitiful.”

“She was always hard and cold and unfeeling towards me, her father,” continued Mr. Alwyn. “I must candidly confess that I’m not surprised

at any depths of infamy to which she may have fallen."

Madame Saurien was thinking of Joan as she remembered her—gentle, grave, with a quaint dignity about her that was unusual in one so young. She was wondering what influence had been powerful enough to work so great a change. And she was disgusted at Mr. Alwyn's selfishness and egotism.

"If I could be of any service I would go over to England at once," she said.

"Why on earth should you do so?" said Mr. Alwyn, in profound astonishment.

"Because I like Joan; because I came nearer to loving her than any woman I ever knew. She had a noble nature, and I respected her. Because she is in sore trouble, and accused of a crime which I would stake my life she never committed; and because——"

Madame Saurien would have added—"because she is your daughter,"—but refrained from

doing so, it being apparent that Mr. Alwyn did not care to be reminded of the fact.

If Joan's sad plight was to be no obstacle in the way of a second marriage for her father, the egotism and the cynicism he displayed gave rise to serious misgivings in Madame Saurien's mind. The grey ashes of a worn-out passion, stirred to new life by the man's persistency and reiterated protestations of affection, died out once more, and this time for ever. Roger Alwyn lost his wife, and had only himself to blame for it.

CHAPTER XI.

AT length the day of the trial came.

The presiding Judge was Mr. Justice Strangeways. He was a very remarkable man. When at the Bar, he was singularly successful, having, during the last ten years of his practice, been employed in every *Nisi Prius* case of any importance; and having had the monopoly of all heavy arbitrations. Though his manner was somewhat metallic, and corresponded to the expression of his features, which was rigid and inflexible, there was not his equal as a cross-examiner. As a judge, his charges to the jury were invariably lucid, and doubtless perfectly fair; but they were always the addresses of a Counsel pressing the jury to adopt his view of the case. He had great sympathy with the op-

pressed, and was able, on occasions, to stir the most indifferent; but his detractors used to say that, on analysis, the judge's sympathy with the oppressed would be found to resolve itself into a keen desire for terrible vengeance on the oppressor, and that the sorrows of the victims rarely moved him. In private life he was a most amusing companion. He was entirely devoid of affectation; he possessed an infinite fund of anecdote, and used to do many acts of kindness, of which the outer world heard little or nothing.

Mr. Benbow, the leading Counsel for the Crown, was one of the most famous men at the Bar, in his particular branch of the profession. As he walked along the street, every detective, every police officer on duty, every cab-driver, and every thief recognised him. If you watched him passing down the Strand, you could not fail to observe the winks and the jerks of the thumb that followed him, the moment his back was

turned. Mr. Benbow was a terror to evil-doers. He was an extremely dangerous man. He had a positive genius for prosecution, and he improved it by persistent practice and most assiduous study of the Criminal Law. He never missed a point. He never overlooked a fact. He treated a man as if he were a Chinese puzzle, or a problem in chess. And for this reason it was very difficult to follow him. He put questions of which even the police did not see the bearing. Whenever a set of papers came to his chambers, he invariably asked himself the question, "How am I to secure a conviction?" He then began to piece the evidence together, and he was certain to bewilder any mind not specially trained, because it was impossible to judge, from the cards he played, what might be the cards that he held in his hand.

Mr. Benbow had developed to the most marvellous degree the power of putting together apparently unconnected facts, and drawing from

them an absolutely irresistible conclusion. He made no pretence to eloquence. He never called down thunder from Heaven. He never appealed to the better instincts of the jury, nor to all that was upright and noble in their natures. He never bullied a witness, nor shook his fist at him, nor made jokes at his expense. He used to go on with his case as if he were a Babbage's calculating machine. He asked his questions—he got his answers. And out came the result, correct to the twentieth place of decimals.

But Mr. Benbow's stony-hearted manner and aspect was the merest mask. It did not deter those who knew him. He put it on to keep up appearances. In reality he was the most genial of men. Without vices or follies, he tolerated the follies of others, and was forgiving to their vices. No man took a broader view of human nature than he did. But like Mr. Wemmick in "Great Expectations" he had one set of opinions for the Court, and another for Walworth.

Such was the Counsel employed against Joan, and it may here be remarked that Mr. Benbow did not entertain the slightest doubt of her guilt.

The court was crowded, men and women jostling and elbowing each other to get a glimpse of the unnatural mother who had killed her child. There was hardly standing-room anywhere, and the proverbial pin might have been heard to drop when the prisoner entered the dock.

Mr. Benbow rose to his feet, and during his opening address Joan's glances turned to the sea of faces beyond her. Suddenly she started, and a wistful light shone in the large brown eyes for a moment, and then died out, and the impassive, stony look came into her face again. The truth was, that she had recognized Frank Thurston, her former lover, who had accepted the brief for the defence, naturally being determined to fight his best in what he could not but feel was a lost cause. But never until the girlish figure and

pale tragic face was before him, had a suspicion of the truth crossed his mind—that Joan Alwyn, the woman he had so fondly loved, and Joan Smith, the unhappy creature indicted for the murder of her child, were one and the same.

The shock was fearful. But he braced himself up to fight the case out to the bitter end. When the counsel for the Crown had concluded his opening address, Malvina Smith was called. She told the story (with repressed malice and the laudable desire that the wicked should meet with their deserts) of the unhappy life her brother and his young wife had led. “From the moment of his birth,” she said, “the child had been a cause of contention between them.”

In cross-examination, she declined to say that the prisoner had ever exhibited any great depth of feeling for her boy. In her opinion, she was a woman absolutely devoid of warmth and affection. From the day that her brother began to

lose his money his wife had treated him with cold disdain, and, indeed, intolerable contempt.

It is only charitable to suppose that Malvina scarcely realised how grossly she was exaggerating and colouring the actual facts. In her bitter hatred and abhorrence of her sister-in-law, she felt herself fully justified in using any weapon which might bring about what she considered a just punishment.

Joan sat and listened as in a dream. She saw herself held up to scorn and contumely, her motives misrepresented, dragged into the light of day, and the poor girl wondered vaguely if it were another Joan and not herself at all that had acted thus. Some of the evidence was of course true, and she recognised the fact that "a lie that is half the truth is a harder matter to fight" than a downright undiluted falsehood.

Then followed the evidence of the doctors, which went to the fact that Cedric Alwyn Smith had died of an overdose of morphia. Nurse

Thacker was examined and gave what details she could in reference to the life led at Engledean by the prisoner and her late husband. In cross-examination she told the court that the mistress had been passionately devoted to her child. "She had no thought," said the old woman, "outside of him. Master Cedric was her pride, her life, her all." It was not much that she could say in the prisoner's favour, but what she could say she did, and left the box visibly agitated.

Formal evidence followed, and then the counsel for the defence addressed the jury. Mr. Thurston was an eloquent man, but never had he been so eloquent as he was to-day. His heart was in the matter, and he rose equal to the occasion. He pointed out to the jury that the evidence against his client was purely circumstantial. "She was not the only person," he said, "who had access to the room where the child lay. Indeed, the house was filled with the ser-

vants, anyone of whom could have entered the room. There was no proof even to show that the prisoner had taken the bottle of morphia from the medicine-chest, and even if she had done so, might she not have intended to use it for the purpose of quieting her own nerves? She might very well have done this, for in all probability her nerves had been utterly unstrung by the events of the preceding week. And it was far from impossible that the little boy had himself obtained possession of the bottle and drunk its contents. The jury had heard how devoted this unhappy young mother had been to her child, and it was a monstrous supposition that her greed for wealth should have tempted her to have taken the life of the being she so deeply loved. She was the child's natural guardian, and his home, had the little fellow lived, would have been hers, and thus she would naturally have derived all the benefit that would have accrued from his fortune. It was utterly inconceivable,"

said he, "that a lady of gentle birth, delicately nurtured, and wholly devoted to her child, as Nurse Thacker had admitted in her evidence, should have committed such an unnatural and horrible crime."

From the moment that the Judge commenced to sum up it was evident that he had formed an unfavourable opinion towards the prisoner. "The verdict is yours and not mine," said he, "and it is for you to say whether the counsel for the defence has adduced any argument that will so weigh with you that you will be able to disregard the evidence tendered on behalf of the Crown. I must confess I am unable to find any such argument myself, but as I have already said the verdict is yours and not mine. If you have any reasonable doubt of the prisoner's guilt it will be your duty as it will be your pleasure to acquit her, but if you think the case for the Crown made out beyond all reasonable doubt then it will be your duty, apart from all consequences to this

unhappy woman, to return a verdict according to the evidence. I have noticed, gentlemen, that you have paid the greatest attention to this case, and I am sure that, having regard to the sanctity of the oath you have taken, you will not shrink from doing your manifest duty, no matter how painful that duty may be. Consider your verdict."

The jury thereupon retired, the Judge left the court, the prisoner was temporarily removed to the cells below, and the buzz of conversation usual at such times immediately commenced.

Opinion was pretty equally divided as to the prisoner's guilt and as to the result. There were those who thought she was guilty, but that the jury would find it difficult to make up their minds to hang so pretty a woman. There were those who thought that the prisoner was innocent, but that the evidence against her and the summing up of the Judge would so influence the twelve yokels in the jury-box that she would un-

doubtedly be convicted. Then there were those who thought she was guilty and would be righteously convicted. And there were those who thought she was innocent and that she would be honourably acquitted. Opinion was altogether, as I have already said, pretty equally divided.

An hour later the jury filed in, and the Judge was fetched into court.

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar, Joan Smith, guilty or not guilty?" asked the clerk of arraigns.

"Guilty," answered the foreman, "and the jury recommend her to mercy."

Joan grasped the rail of the dock absolutely stunned in no sense rightly understanding the situation, but her eyes swept the court. Where was the man who had loved her—the man who had sworn to aid her in her hour of need?

Instinctively she stretched out her arms, as if beseeching his protection.

Frank Thurston kept his eyes turned down-

wards, for he dared not raise them to the white, stricken face.

When the clerk of arraigns asked the prisoner whether she had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon her, she merely shook her head and murmured, "He knows—He will forgive."

* * * * *

"I never felt so ill in my life," said Thurston that evening to his greatest friend on the circuit. "I am sure that I have bungled the case and that it is through me the poor girl is convicted."

"My dear fellow," was the answer, "I never knew you conduct a case better. You have certainly nothing to reproach yourself with. You did it so well that I am certain you believed in her innocence."

"I did—I do. I am morally convinced that she is not responsible for her actions—there is the key to the whole mystery. I wish that I

could have talked the matter over with her before the trial—but——”

“Now it’s too late.”

“No, it isn’t too late. I will not leave a stone unturned to save her.”

If the walls of the condemned cells could speak what thrilling tales they would tell of the anguish a human soul can feel! But Joan did not suffer. Indeed, she was past feeling. She knew that she must die, and she was not afraid to die.

Meanwhile the prison surgeon’s mind had developed doubts as to her sanity, and two medical experts were sent down to the gaol by the Treasury to examine into her condition. Joan did not know who they were, nor what their object was, nor did she betray the smallest curiosity.

There was no disputing the fact that her mind, with respect to the events of that awful night, was a complete blank. The effort to re-

call and fix her thoughts was beyond her, and long before the medical examination was at an end, she grew ashy white, and put her hand to her side as if in pain.

"I don't like that blue look about her lips," remarked one of the female warders that same night. "You mark my words, she'll never live to be hanged. It's my belief that any shock would kill her in a minute. Why, she's just as weak as a baby."

A day or two later, when Joan was told that her counsel had expressed a wish to see her, she winced and would have refused, but after a time was persuaded to grant him an interview.

The sight of the fallen figure and the wan face with its hollow eyes almost unmanned Thurston. No one knew what passed at that meeting, for the female warders did not intrude their presence more than the prison regulations compelled them to do; but there were traces of tears on Joan's cheeks, and from that time there

was a change in her. She became restless and excited, and she did not sleep, nor could she eat.

And so the days wore away until the last before that fixed for the execution dawned. A demon of unrest had seized upon the unhappy woman. She paced her cell hour by hour, often pausing to listen, and then commencing her dreary walk again—up and down—up and down.

It was evening. The clock had just struck nine, and the attendants were trying to persuade Joan to lie down and try to rest, when there came the sound of footsteps, the door was flung open, and the governor of the prison entered, accompanied by Frank Thurston. Joan sprang to her feet, her face lit up with excitement, her whole frame quivering.

“Is it death?” she asked. “Is it—death?”

“No, my child, you are to be taken to Broadmoor, where they will be kind to you, and soon cure you, I am sure. Oh, my love! my darling love!”

She came slowly towards him. "Frank," she whispered, "you will forgive me—now?"

"I forgave you long ago," he answered gently. "My Joan."

She lifted her wasted arms and laid them about his neck, their lips met, trembled, clung together—then the brown head fell on his bosom.

There were tears in Frank's eyes, and he brushed them away before he looked down at her; then—"Joan!" he cried sharply, "what is it?—one word, my darling, one word."

Not till the eternal meeting, for Joan was at peace at last.

A FRENCH MARRIAGE.

A FRENCH MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE VICAR AND HIS DAUGHTER.

CLARE STANTON was in high spirits; her father—the hard-worked Vicar of Houghton-Darrell—was about to take his annual holiday, and this, to Clare, meant an endless round of pleasure, and a delightful reprieve from the cares and worries of a small country parish. Clare was an only child, and had lost her mother at an early age. She had, therefore, become her father's right hand in all the duties which a woman could perform, and, moreover,

she was the very apple of his eye. Always useful and sensible, never complaining of the work that devolved upon her, she was almost as much beloved by her father's parishioners as by the old Vicar himself.

Now, although Clare took the greatest interest in her manifold duties, still the annual holiday of a month was always welcome. There were new places to be visited, fresh scenes to interest her, and she and her father would both return to Houghton-Darrell with a new zest for parochial work, and at the same time with a happy remembrance of their idle days. This year Mr. Stanton had decided to pass the first half of his holiday in London. There were many sights in the great metropolis unknown to Clare and her father, and they were both looking forward to a fortnight in the expiring season to complete their knowledge and to see some of the celebrities of whom they had read such wonderful accounts in the papers.

How true it is that that which we expect to be most productive of pleasure is often the reverse, and that when things look darkest and least encouraging they suddenly turn out most joyful and indeed utterly different from our preconceived ideas. Clare, when she started for London, was delighted with the prospect before her. Her father needed repose and change, and if he was a little pale now, and the wrinkles on his face were becoming every day more marked, he would soon pick up among fresh scenes, and return to Houghton-Darrell with renewed strength and vigour. Then, too, the same might be said for herself. Eleven months of daily routine was certainly trying to a young girl of her age; always the same faces to be seen, always the same consolation to be given to the old and needy, and always the same household cares to be daily experienced. And yet if Clare could have known the future, if she could have lifted that terrible dark veil which hides from us our

future lives, how gladly would she have remained quietly in her father's vicarage, and have given up this one month's holiday.

The Stantons had been but a few days in London when they met one day in the Park Sir Guy and Lady Darrell. The meeting was a pleasant one for all concerned. Sir Guy was patron of the living of Houghton-Darrell and a man of great importance in his county, and moreover he had a great affection for his Vicar as well as for his Vicar's daughter. It was some time since they had met, as the Darrells had been travelling abroad for two years for the benefit of Lady Darrell's health, and they were, therefore, unfeignedly glad to see each other again. The two ladies were soon absorbed in talking over the dear old home. There was so much to be told, so many little bits of gossip to be discussed, which even the regular correspondence which had been kept up between them had failed to relate, and Sir Guy and

Mr. Stanton had also many common points of interest.

At last the conversation between the latter began to flag, and then Sir Guy, looking admiringly at Clare, remarked that he found her much changed. When he had left Houghton-Darrell, two years ago, Clare was but sixteen and at that period scarcely promised to turn into the beauty she had now become. From an unformed country girl, unfinished in face and figure, she had grown into a remarkable specimen of a most delicate and high-bred English beauty. Her features were almost perfect, and her hair and complexion such as are rarely met with anywhere except on this side of the Channel. Mr. Stanton was pleased at Sir Guy's approval and the genuine manner in which he expressed his admiration. The old Vicar knew that his daughter was pretty, but he scarcely realised the effect she was likely to produce on strangers or on those who had not seen her for some time.

"You will not keep her long, Stanton," said Sir Guy. "It will not be many months before someone falls head over ears in love with her."

Mr. Stanton shook his head. The idea was one which had often occurred to him. Evidently one day or another he would have to make up his mind to part with his cherished idol, but he tried not to think of it. Clare was still a child in his eyes, and he trusted that many years might yet elapse ere he was called upon to witness her departure from the vicarage.

"We see so few people at Houghton-Darrell," he said. "Clare has not many opportunities of turning young men's heads."

Sir Guy assented. Evidently Houghton-Darrell was not a place where such a peerless beauty would be likely to make a suitable match, but still he insisted that Mr. Stanton must make up his mind to lose her at no very distant date. The Stantons had still another week to spend in town, and the Darrells begged that they might

see as much of them as possible during that time. Lady Darrell said they must come and dine with them on the next evening. They were expecting a few friends to whom they would be proud to show their county beauty.

The father and daughter gladly accepted the invitation, although demurring to the flattery which accompanied it. It was an entirely new experience for Clare, and she felt almost nervous as she thought of it. A real London dinner party! There would be all sorts of grand and clever people, and she felt fearful that she might be out of her element. The society she had mixed in at Houghton-Darrell had been very limited. Occasional tea parties, a charity bazaar, or a flower show had hitherto been about the extent of her dissipation. But now she was going to be launched into the London world, and the idea almost frightened her. Her father reassured her as they walked slowly home together.

“Society is like everything else in the world,”

said the Vicar. "It contains good and bad elements. The evil is often exaggerated and the good under-rated. It will be all new to you, and you are sure to amuse yourself."

"The Darrells are so kind," said Clare reflectively. "It is impossible to feel ill at ease with them, and yet I think, father, we are happier when quite alone with each other."

Her father laughed, and said that they could not always remain inseparable; a day must come when they would have to part.

Was it a presentiment of approaching evil or a terrible curse which would blight both their lives, which made Clare press closer to her father as she answered:

"May that day be ever, ever so far away! I shall never know happiness when I leave you!"

CHAPTER II.

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS.

THE dinner party was a great success—especially for Miss Stanton. Clare was admired and fêted beyond her wildest expectations. The party consisted of twelve only, two or three married couples and a few men of whom it could be said that they made a profession of dining out—young men with small means, but plenty of assurance, who have always the very latest story to tell, or who can invent one if the *chroniques scandaleuses* do not happen to have supplied one for that particular evening. These young men all admired Clare, but having ascertained early in the evening that she was the penniless daughter of a country clergyman, it is scarcely

necessary to add that their admiration was of a respectful and lukewarm nature.

Among the guests was a Frenchman, the Marquis de Fonterouge, who at that moment happened to be secretary in the French Embassy in London. His enquiries as to the identity of the lovely *débutante* were amongst the most eager and pressing. The Marquis took Sir Guy aside the moment Clare entered the room and enquired her name. He declared that she was a vision, a beautiful pink pearl, and "the type of angelic ethereal beauty."

Sir Guy laughed at him. The host knew the Frenchman's easily inflammable nature and how he had wandered *de la brune à la blonde* always finding perfection at first and always getting tired of his conquests after a few days or weeks.

Sir Guy told him that Miss Stanton was the daughter of his Vicar, and that she and her father

were great friends of his, and promised to introduce him later in the evening.

"Then she is not married?" asked the Frenchman, in a tone of slight disappointment.

"No, she is not married," said Sir Guy; "but I told her father yesterday that it would not be long before he had to welcome a son-in-law."

"It is a pity," said the Marquis.

"What is a pity?" asked Sir Guy. "You would not surely condemn her to be an old maid?"

"Oh, no," laughed the Frenchman, "but it is a pity that she is not married. Married women are so much pleasanter and easier to get on with than young girls."

"You are perfectly incorrigible," said Sir Guy. "You mean that married women are an easier prey?"

"I do not seek prey," said de Fonterouge, sentimentally; "I seek a true affection."

"Then, perhaps, Miss Stanton might fulfil

your quest," answered Sir Guy. "I am sure that she has never been in love."

"English women are too cold," said the Marquis. "Very few are capable of loving."

"You are most unjust to my country-women," said Sir Guy. "If their affection is less demonstrative than that of other women, it is, I am sure, more durable."

"But one does not want durability," replied the other, fretfully. "It is all very well for a tradesman to say that his cloth is durable, and that it will last for ever—what one wants in a woman is passion, reckless love, jealousy, a contempt for danger, and a disregard of conventionalities. After that, oblivion, death—anything but durability and the dreadful humdrum of a placid life and a calm affection."

"You are altogether beyond me," said Sir Guy, with a laugh, moving off. "Go and talk to Lady Darrell, and expound to her your dreadful

theories; and then ask her if she thinks you are a fit person to be presented to Miss Stanton. I would not attempt to take the responsibility of the introduction after what you have just said."

M. de Fonterouge shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, and walked across to Lady Darrell, who was always amused by him. She knew that he was never serious; that he was almost incapable of love himself, and yet that he always wished to give people the idea that he was misunderstood, and that he found no one to reciprocate the oceans of affection which were overflowing his too sensitive heart.

The conversation at once fell upon Clare. De Fonterouge could talk of no one else that evening, and, later on, his happiness was completed by being introduced to her. He was too much a man of the world to indulge in vapid compliments, and his conversation with her took the form of being immensely interested in her country home. He asked her endless questions

about her occupations and her father's work, all of which made Clare feel at her ease, and induced her to take a sudden fancy to him. He knew better than to talk about London to a little country mouse, who understood nothing of the life, and who had already been unutterably bored by the young man who took her down to dinner, telling her the exact number of balls he had been to that season, and generally attempting to convince her of his social triumphs. De Fonterouge, who was well aware that the great charm of conversation consists in the art of listening, appeared to be thoroughly interested in everything Clare told him. He said that it was all so strange to him. He had always longed to live in the country in England—to enjoy that delightful sense of absolute repose which would only be obtained there. He loved his old château in France; indeed, it was there he had spent his happiest days, but he was sure it was not the same thing as the country in England.

There were constant political troubles going on in France. Then, too, the peasants were dissatisfied, grasping, and avaricious; and, moreover, religion was rapidly dying out altogether.

Clare was delighted with him and with his unaffected manner. The time seemed to have passed so rapidly that she was quite surprised when her father came across to her and said that it was eleven o'clock, and that they must think about going home. She introduced the Marquis de Fonterouge to the Vicar, and then the two men chatted pleasantly for a few minutes, and then Lady Darrell came up, and there was another pleasant surprise for Clare. The Darrells were going yachting the next week, and her kindly hostess informed Clare that she had gained her father's consent to an arrangement that he and his daughter should complete her party. They were going over to France, and intended spending the first few days at Trouville. Clare clapped her hands with joy. She had never

been on board a yacht, and had never been to France. It all seemed too delightful. She thanked the Darrells effusively; and then her Ladyship turned to de Fonterouge, and said:

“You have not forgotten your promise, I hope, Marquis? You know we start on Tuesday.”

De Fonterouge looked very serious. No, he had not forgotten his promise, and with this English angel on board he was not likely to forget it. He bowed, and murmured a few words having reference to the great pleasure he anticipated.

And then the Stantons took their leave, and Clare went home with her head full of fresh ideas. How bright her life seemed at this moment. It would not last long, truly. Her father must return in a fortnight to Houghton-Darrell, and the pleasures of their holiday would be over; but still, it all seemed delightful now. The

Vicar was in good spirits—better, already, for the change from the country; and Clare experienced that absolute hope and content which it is the privilege of the young alone to enjoy.

CHAPTER III.

AT TROUVILLE.

THE following week found all the party on board the Darrells' yacht the "Seagull." They had made a delightfully calm trip across the Channel, and were safely anchored in Trouville harbour. The "Seagull" was a fine specimen of her class, and even surrounded as she was by "Chocolat Menier's" splendid "Nemesis," the Duke of Hamilton's "Thistle," and the Rothschild's "Eros," was not seen to disadvantage. It was the race week at Deauville, and all seemed bright and lively. Everything was so new to Clare, that her eyes were kept wide open in amazement at the many sights she saw.

To begin with, the yacht itself was a perfect

marvel to her. She had no idea that so much comfort and luxury could be contained in so small a space. There was a spacious drawing-room, prettily decorated with flowers and plants, and containing an excellent piano and all the attributes of a real London drawing-room. The sleeping apartments were large and airy, but her greatest wonder was shown when she saw the ship lit by electric light at night. The Darrells had been all round the world in the "Seagull," and every nook and corner of it contained pictures or trophies of the places they had visited. All this interested Clare; and then when they reached Trouville there were the new faces to be seen, the quaint costumes of the fisher people, and the astounding toilettes of the Parisians. But, above all this, there was the kind and respectful attention of the Marquis de Fonterouge, who never seemed weary of her society, and who kindly explained to her anything she did not understand. Of course, he knew everyone at

Trouville and Deauville. Invitations came pouring in for him from smart ladies who occupied their villas at Deauville only during the ten days the races lasted, and who were off to Aix-les-Bains to play baccarat the moment there was no more excitement to be had at Deauville. But de Fonterouge turned a deaf ear to all their entreaties to dine and to dance and to take part in theatrical performances. He would have none of them. For the moment he was devoted to his "little angel," as he continued to call her. She was more charming than ever in her plain blue serge dress, trimmed with white braid, and the ladies who had spent hours with Worth, Felix, and Pingat had no attraction for him now. The Darrells let things take their course; they knew he was very rich and a gentleman, and if he chose to fall in love with Clare, he could marry her and everyone would be happy. He was a good-looking man, tall, and dark, with handsome features, and it was quite likely that

Clare would fall in love with him. They were left much to their own devices, being the only young people of the party. The poor old Vicar had innocent views on the subject of flirtation. It never occurred to him that Clare would fall in love with a Frenchman, or that so exalted a being as the Marquis would fall in love with his daughter; so on those hot August afternoons he would be quietly playing dummy whist with the Darrells whilst de Fonterouge was doing his best to gain his daughter's heart.

De Fonterouge became more entangled every day. There were many objections to his being in love with this pretty little parson's daughter, and he felt them all acutely, but yet he was powerless to fight against the feeling. He disapproved of marriage on principle—but of course he would have to marry some day. He had long been sought for by the dowagers of the Faubourg St. Germain for their daughters and nieces, and he had had his choice offered him

of innumerable good matches. But marriage was an evil day that he sought to put off as long as possible. Marriage meant loss of freedom, of being asked where you are going when you go out, why you do this, that, and the other; or else it meant indifference on the part of your wife—and indifference which implied that she has sought consolation elsewhere. Such was his idea of marriage as conducted in France. With Clare there would be no fear of the latter state of things. Englishwomen were renowned for their virtue—rightly or wrongly—but would she prove companionable after ten or a dozen years of matrimony? Would he not be bored and would he not regret the loss of that precious liberty so dear to all bachelors? He thought thus when alone, when everyone had retired to rest, and he was left to himself to smoke endless cigarettes and ponder over the day that had passed. Then there were moments when he reflected that he had gone far enough, that he

must pull himself together, and shake off the influence of this *charmante mees*. He would go to the Deauville Club and sit up all night playing baccarat, and then as soon as he had made up his mind to give her up, he would be seized with a sudden revulsion of feeling, and would throw away his last cigarette. Then, he would be tired and dull the next day, and she would notice it, and it would make her sad. Then he would go to bed and dream of her all night. He had all his life scoffed at love, and now he felt that he was taken in its grip. He might battle against it as much as he liked, but he had all its worst symptoms. He was miserable when not by the side of Miss Stanton, who was never out of his thoughts day or night. Every word she had ever said to him was engraved on his memory, and he had ceased to take an interest in his former pleasures. Yes, this was the love about which people wrote; the love which was overwhelming, and which left you no peace of

mind. He could not fight against it, and he must succumb. There was nothing new to be said on the subject—everything that could be written and said had been exhausted, and he was a victim.

The days passed by and de Fonterouge remained in this undecided state. The feeling he had for Clare was evidently reciprocated. She blushed when she was alone with him, and he paid her those tender loving compliments of which Frenchmen have such an unlimited stock.

There was no longer any conversation about her father's parish. Now de Fonterouge could only speak of her, and if his love was not openly declared its existence was suggested in a thousand different ways. Clare knew that he loved her and she fully returned his love. She never imagined for a moment that he argued with himself as to the wisdom of his passion, and did all in his power to suppress it. If he did not make her a formal proposal of marriage, she was sure

that it was because he had not known her long enough, and that he feared to take her by surprise.

Still she felt convinced that it was only a matter of days, and that ere they returned to Houghton-Darrell he would tell her that he loved her and ask her in return for that love which she was already so willing to give.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE LETTERS.

No. I.—From Miss Clare Stanton, yacht *Seagull*, Trouville, France, to Miss Ellen St. Quentin, Hotel Victoria, Interlaken, Switzerland.

“AUGUST 20TH, 1887.

“MY DEAREST NELLIE,—Your jolly letter had to be forwarded from the Vicarage, and was some time following us about before it reached me, or I should have answered it long ago. I’m so glad to hear that you are enjoying yourself. I only wish you were here, though; I am sure you would like it better than tramping along the beaten track even in lovely Switzerland. You must know this is quite an unexpected pleasure.

We had nearly come to the end of the first week of papa's holiday—which, to please me (dear old man), he consented to spend in London—when one day we met Sir Guy Darrell and his wife in the park. They have been away from England for two years; and as they and papa are quite old friends (Sir Guy is the patron of papa's living), there was great rejoicing and an invitation to dinner over the event. It was a lucky meeting for one reason, because the Darrells were just leaving town again for a cruise in their yacht; but it was luckier still for another, as dinner was not over before Sir Guy had invited us to join his party. Of course papa objected at first, but we soon overcame his scruples; and so here we are 'aboard' the *Seagull*, one hundred and sixty ton schooner, as big as a house and twice as comfortable. I had no idea that yachts were so much like drawing-rooms before, or that yachting was so delightful. We are all good sailors; the weather is lovely, and my blue serge costume

trimmed with white braid suits me quite too well. So I'm very satisfied with my lot, particularly as it is not every day that one gets a chance of a cruise down the Channel.

"We are travelling in a deliciously Bohemian way, going the round of all the watering-places, and staying at each just as long as they amuse us, and by the time the trip is ended I shall be a regular 'yachts-girl'—if there is such a word. I like Trouville very much. It is very picturesque, and we have met some very nice people; among others the Marquis de Fonterouge, the Secretary of the French Embassy in London, who is a great friend of the Darrells. He's going to drive us over to Honfleur to-day in his drag, and I am to have the box-seat. There, Miss Nellie!

"The post-bag is just going ashore, so good-bye for the present.—Ever your affectionate
CLARE.

"P.S.—M. de Fonterouge is very tall and good-looking, very well off, and was wounded

three times in the Franco-Prussian war before he was eighteen. So, you see, he's rather different from the ordinary continental 'Marquis.'"

No. II.—From the Marquis de Fonterouge,
Hôtel de Paris, Trouville, to the Duc de
Tracas, Château de la Tracasserie, près
Tours.

"AUGUST 20TH, 1887.

"MON CHER,—One line to thank you a thousand times for your affectionate and hospitable invitation. Another line, alas! to tell you that it is impossible for me to accept it, as I am already engaged to finish the yachting season on board my old friend Sir Guy Darrell's beautiful *goëlette Seagull*, and then to stay with him for some time partridge shooting at his château in Staffordshire.

"It is fortunate for me that, in addition to the sport which Sir Guy promises me at Darrell Hall, I shall be able to indulge my pastoral taste

in the company of a good Anglican priest, who, with his daughter, is of our party. It seems that he is the *desservant* of Houghton-Darrell, a church on Sir Guy's estate; and he has promised to show me the inner life of the English peasant. His daughter, Miss Clare—without art, without coquetry, without even knowing it—has made fury here. It is a Greuze—a simple, gay, unaffected, charming daughter of Albion. You should see her, *mon vieux*! For Madame la Duchesse the expression of my sincerest regrets and devotion. For you, *farceur*, a cordial grip of the hand.

“Your friend,

“DE FONTEROUGE.”

No. III.—From the Rev. Jonathan Growler, Saint Paul's College, Oxford, to the Rev. Richard Stanton, the Vicarage, Houghton-Darrell.

“OCTOBER, 1887.

“MY DEAR RICHARD,—In answer to your lengthy announcement of Clare's approaching

marriage to a Frenchman, I have only to say that I am sorry to hear it.

"No doubt, as your solicitors have made the necessary inquiries, and not yourself, everything (but one) is satisfactory. No doubt the man is not an impostor, or Guy Darrell wouldn't have made a friend of him, if *you* had.

"But, putting aside the question as to whether matrimony is a necessary evil, or a very unnecessary one for any sensible person, France is France and England is England. Why couldn't you find an English idiot for the girl instead of a French zany?

"Mark my words! *It was not without reason* that a gulf was fixed between Calais and Dover.

"Yours in a hurry,

"JONATHAN GROWLER."

CHAPTER V.

THE MARQUIS'S INTENTIONS.

THE day was now drawing near when the visit must come to an end. The Stantons must return to Houghton-Darrell, and they would have to live for the next eleven months on the memory of one of the pleasantest holidays that they had ever passed. On the day prior to their departure they decided to go to the races. It was one of the most interesting days of the meeting, and Mr. Stanton had none of the narrow-minded prejudice which makes a racecourse a place to be shunned by anyone calling himself a Christian.

Clare was much amused at the gay scene. Deauville races are the French Goodwood, and the scene was a picturesque and brilliant one.

There were crowds of pretty, well-dressed women, and yet none prettier or more admired than Clare. She was happy with de Fonterouge by her side, pointing out the celebrities to her, and explaining the different races as they took place, and he was proud to walk with her on the lawn, and see the admiration she created. His men-friends all chaffed him, when he left her to do his betting. They hoped he would not regret forsaking his old "pals" for "*la perfide Albion*," and the women were even more exasperating. There was a certain very dainty little Vicomtesse with whom de Fonterouge had had tender moments, and this lady was merciless towards her rival.

"Is it for that little china statue that you have deserted us?" she inquired when she found herself alone with him.

"She is not at all a statue, I can assure you," he laughed; "she is very human."

"She is very pretty," admitted the Vicomtesse; "but she must be terribly dull."

"She might not amuse you," said de Fonterouge, drily.

"But she *does* amuse you? Then you must be in love with her; or is it only the sport of breaking her heart which you find amusing?"

"I have no intention of breaking her heart," said the Marquis.

"But you will do so if you go too far," she persisted; "she looks very sentimental and childish. Those fair women with big blue eyes have a ready stock of tears, and you must be careful, or you will make her shed them."

"I hope I shall never cause her the least sorrow," he said gravely.

"Then it is really serious!" she exclaimed; "you are going to be married, and you have told no one?"

"I did not say I was going to be married," he answered.

"But you implied it. Grand Dieu!" she exclaimed with horror, "how I pity you! Her

father is that venerable *pasteur* who was with you just now. What a life you will lead. He will take you to his *temple* and make you listen to his prosy old sermons, and you will have prayers night and day; and if you do not join in them the blue eyes will fill with tears and reproach you so sadly that you will have to end by giving in. *Ah, mon cher Raoul, ne faites pas cette folie-là!*”

De Fonterouge laughed.

“You draw a lamentable picture of my future life,” he said. “I am not married, and even if I did marry Miss Stanton I should not see much of her father.”

“I once stayed in an English country house,” said the Vicomtesse, paying no heed to him, “and I was never so bored in my life. Everything was perfect, except the people, but they were altogether beyond me. In the morning there were prayers. All the servants came in and were given small doses of Christian principles. After breakfast the men went long shoot-

ing expeditions, and in the evening they went to sleep until the poor servants were called in again and then there were more prayers and hymns until we were released and went to bed with the prospect of its all being repeated the next day. The third day I had a telegram from Paris urging me imperatively to return, and I took my leave saying, I had never enjoyed myself so much and promising to return at the earliest opportunity."

"You are evidently not made for a country life," he said.

"Not as it is understood in England," she answered. "Every element which makes the country bearable was absent at the house where I stayed."

"If I married, of course I should live in France," he said.

"But the old *pasteur* would hunt you down and settle on you with his hymns. Take my advice, Raoul, and have nothing to do with strangers; it always ends badly. If you must

marry, and, for the sake of your title, I suppose you will do so some day, make a *mariage de convenance*. Marry some young lady, your equal in rank and fortune, and continue to live as you have always lived. Love matches are the greatest possible mistake."

"I would not marry without love," he said.

Then Madame de Taillement felt that there was nothing to be said. In her opinion a man who at the end of the nineteenth century declared that he would only marry for love was simply fit for a lunatic asylum.

"If you must marry a stranger," she said, presently, "if your countrywomen are not sufficiently good for you, marry an American heiress. There are plenty of them here; I will introduce you to a dozen. Come and dine to-night. There is a *ravissante* Miss Blobbs coming. She has millions, and she is pretty and dresses well."

"I don't like Americans," he said, "they are loud and unladylike."

"Not all," said the Vicomtesse, "Miss Blobbs is very quiet, but of course she has been everywhere and seen everything, and she can *talk*. I suppose your *ingénue* can only say 'papa,' 'mamma'?"

"Her innocence is one of her greatest charms, I admit," he replied.

"Yes, but the moment she is married she will be no longer innocent," said Madame de Taillement. "If that is her only charm think of the life you are preparing for yourself."

"You give very bad advice," he laughed, "and I will not listen to you any more. I am living in paradise at present, and I shall remain there as long as I can."

"Then you won't come and dine to-night?"

"No, thank you. It is their last evening. They are leaving to-morrow, but I will come and see you after they are gone."

"Do so, and don't commit yourself if you have not done so already."

Then he took her back to her friends, glad

to escape from her chatter, and quite unaffected by her worldly, cynical views on marriage. He was thankful to be no longer in that set; thankful to be free of women who lived only for excitement and pleasure, and yet there were certain things she had said which struck him as being true. Marriages between people of different nationalities rarely turned out a success. Then, too, the manners and customs of England and France were totally different, and he might find out too late that he had made a mistake. He would take her advice and not commit himself. If after Clare had gone he still felt that he loved her and that life was unbearable without her, it would then be time to propose, but prudence certainly suggested that he should have time to reflect.

He went back to Clare, and she having witnessed what she considered a strong flirtation between him and Madame de Taillement, had already experienced the first sad moment of love,

She had seen them talking and laughing, and she naturally thought that the pretty little woman who made such good use of her eyes had done her best to fascinate him. She attempted to talk naturally, but the idea that he had been more amused by this woman than he ever could be by her gave her a dull pain at her heart.

"Did you win on that last race?" she asked him.

"I did not bet," he answered, "I was talking to some friends."

"I saw you talking to a lady," she said, unable to govern her curiosity. "She is pretty."

"Yes," he answered, "she was pretty a few years ago, but she is not very young."

"Is she married?" asked Clare.

"Yes," he answered, laconically.

"Have you known her long?"

"Ever so long," he said, smiling, and then he added, "Why? Does she interest you?"

"She seemed to interest you," said Clare,

unable to keep from blushing and angry with herself at letting him see her annoyance.

"On the contrary, she does not interest me in the least,—not in the very least," he repeated, emphatically, and looking at her straight in the eyes.

"You seemed to have a great deal to say," remarked Clare.

"She asked me to dinner and I refused; that was about the whole gist of our conversation." And then he added, "She told me that I should meet a beautiful American with millions. She did not specify if the millions were dollars, francs, or pounds, but even with that inducement I refused."

"Why did you refuse?" asked Clare.

"Because it is your last evening here and I wished to spend it with you."

"It is very kind of you, but I am sorry you should have had to make a sacrifice for us."

"It would have been a sacrifice to dine with

Madame de Taillement," he said, "but it is not one to spend an evening with you."

This was very delightful for Clare to listen to. She felt that if the Frenchwoman had enjoyed a triumph it had only been a momentary one, but still she hoped that something more definite would be said before she left. Perhaps he had only been flirting with her all this time, and when she had gone he would dine with the little Vicomtesse and end by marrying the American heiress. Surely not! surely he loved her as she loved him with all her heart and soul. He could not be so cruel as to break her heart after having won it.

In the evening after dinner, Lady Darrell spoke to her when the two women were sitting alone on deck.

"I am so sorry you have to leave," she said, "but we shall soon be at Houghton-Darrell ourselves, and you must come and pay us a few days' visit, if your father can spare you."

"I will do so with pleasure," said Clare.

"You must not mind what I am going to say," continued Lady Darrell. "Of course we have both noticed that Monsieur de Fonterouge has paid you a great deal of attention, and this afternoon my husband tells me he proposed himself to stay with us at home. It is evident therefore that he is in love with you, and I think it only right that I should know your feelings towards him before I let it go any further."

Clare said nothing—she looked down and was unable to frame an answer. She scarcely liked to say that she was in love with a man who had not himself asked her if she were, and she was overcome with joy at Lady Darrell's words, and at the prospect of seeing him again so soon.

"You can speak openly to me, my child," said Lady Darrell, noticing her hesitation. "You know in France it is unusual for a man to declare himself personally to the young lady he

wishes to marry. If the Marquis has gone so far as to invite himself to Houghton-Darrell it is with a serious intention, and it is for this reason that I speak to you on the subject."

"I like him very much," said Clare almost inaudibly.

"Enough to be his wife, if he asks you to be so?" said Lady Darrell.

"Yes," said Clare, and then Lady Darrell had a great deal more to say. She told Clare that she knew some of his family, that he was in every respect a worthy match for her, and she had not concluded her laudatory remarks when the men of the party joined them and the conversation had to be dropped.

The next morning they steamed over to Havre, where the Stantons took the boat for Southampton and the day after they were home again at Houghton-Darrell.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AMERICAN HEIRESS.

A FEW days after the Stantons left Trouville the Darrells also left. They went on to Dieppe, in common with most of the people who make pleasure a profession. The races were at Trouville, but they began again at Dieppe. The same horses ran there, the same faces were to be seen on the racecourse, and there were the same yachts in the harbour. De Fonterouge did not accompany them. He had not got over his attack, as Madame de Taillement called it, and he did not care for fresh gaieties. The little Frenchwoman also remained. She had been "hard hit" at the races, she declared, and she was tired of them. She always lost, and the

men were all too occupied with their gambling to afford her any consolation. So she remained at Deauville, and de Fonterouge occasionally went to see her, and talked to her about his love for Miss Stanton. He told her that he could not forget the English girl, and that he had determined to make her his wife. The Frenchwoman tried to laugh him out of it, but she saw that he was serious, and that there was nothing to be done. One day she invited him again to come and dine. "You must see my Blobbs," she said; "she will make you forget your little Puritan."

"I will see your Blobbs, as you call her," he said, "but I can never think of anyone but that charming child."

Still he went, and sat next to the Yankee beauty at dinner and was amiable and gracious to her. She was pretty, with small delicate features, and had plenty of *chic*. But it was all to no purpose. He could not succeed in banish-

ing the image of Clare Stanton. The young lady did her best to fascinate him. She was quite ready to bestow her millions upon a French marquis of good family, and who was also possessed of a good fortune. She would have preferred an Italian Prince, but so many of her compatriots had married Italian princes that they were getting rather scarce now, and she would not have a Papal title. It must be the genuine article, and failing that, perhaps a French marquis was the next best.

Miss Blobbs had been educated in Europe and spoke French perfectly. American young ladies, it is well known, are adepts in the art of flirtation, and Miss Blobbs was no exception to the rule. She made good use of the time she passed by the side of de Fonterouge, but it was up-hill work, and at the end of dinner she felt that she had not produced the desired impression. When alone with Madame de Taillement she asked her some particulars concerning him.

"Why is he so dull?" she said. "He is about the first Frenchman I ever met who was not amusing."

"He is in love," answered the Vicomtesse, briefly.

"That explains it," said the Yankee belle, and then added, "What a bore men become when they are in love!"

"Yes," answered her hostess, "and especially when it is for the first time. Raoul has had lots of flirtations more or less innocent, but I really think it is the first time he has been seriously in love, and it has rendered him as stupid as a school boy."

"I suppose it is that little English girl he was about with at the races?" inquired Miss Blobbs.

"Exactly," answered Madame de Taillement. "What do you think of her?"

"She is like scores of other English girls," answered the American, "fresh and pretty, but I

can scarcely understand her turning his head so completely. Is he going to marry her?"

"I have advised him not to do so," said Madame de Taillement. "It would be a wretched marriage for him. At one time he used to listen to me, but now I think he is really too far gone to listen to anyone."

"Has she any money?" asked Miss Blobbs.

"Not a penny, I should think," answered the other. "Her father is a clergyman. I believe she has only her blue eyes for fortune."

"And he is very rich?"

"Yes, he has a fine place and a fairly large income, but he says he will only marry for love. Can you understand such a sentiment nowadays?"

"I suppose some sort of love is necessary," said the heiress, reflectively; "they may be very happy together. It rather interests me. He is very good looking."

"Yes," replied Madame de Taillement, "I

wish I could save him. I wish he had taken a fancy to you."

Miss Blobbs laughed outright.

"It is very evident he did not, isn't it?" she said.

"I think he admired you," answered the Frenchwoman, not knowing exactly what to say.

Miss Blobbs felt also that he admired her. She was so used to admiration, had received so many offers of marriage since she had mixed in the world, that she would indeed have thought it strange if this man had not been struck in some way by her charms. Hitherto the offers she had received had not been of a sufficiently tempting nature to induce her to renounce her independence and liberty. Like all true daughters of a Republic it was rank that she desired, and in her case her fortune was big enough to exact that the rank should be of an exalted and unimpeachable character. No younger sons nor bearers of new honours need apply. The man who gained her

hand and her dollars must possess a stainless name and a high-sounding title. It was all very well for her compatriots to talk of the vices of the aristocracy and to declare that they were an effete class. She felt that she would gladly overlook these little drawbacks so long as she could take precedence of other American girls who had made less brilliant marriages and whose money had not enabled them to purchase so high-class a husband. After what Madame de Taillement had told her of the Marquis de Fonterouge, she was convinced that he would have been the very man for her. But evidently it was not to be. He was hopelessly in love with a little English country girl, and she must pass another winter at Rome and see if there appeared no new Italian Prince on the matrimonial horizon.

When the men returned to the drawing-room, Monsieur de Fonterouge joined her and Madame de Taillement, and the conversation took a more lively turn. The Marquis seemed in better spirits

now, and appeared delighted when Miss Blobbs consented to give one of her inimitable performances on the banjo.

Susannah Blobbs had played the banjo in half the drawing-rooms in Europe.

It was her one accomplishment, and she made the most of it. Everyone played the piano more or less, and very few ladies were to be found who could not "oblige" with a little ballad when conversation flagged or men were too lazy to talk; but it was not everyone who had such complete knowledge of the banjo, or who could draw such melodious strains from its limited resources as she. Moreover, she adopted a *pose* which she knew to be becoming, and which she had carefully studied beforehand; and so, when she had twanged a little, to see that her instrument was in tune, she sat down and broke into "Down by Swanee River."

Of course, everyone was delighted. Even de Fonterouge expressed his admiration of her

talents, and begged for a repetition; and then Miss Blobbs favoured them with an air from a comic opera, which was a little more difficult, and consequently not quite so successful as the negro melody. Still, the whole performance was a novelty to French people, and if there is one thing French people love it is novelty; so Miss Blobbs gained her *quart d'heure* of fame, and she was happy.

De Fonterouge left the villa with mixed feelings of pleasure and regret. He was glad that he had seen all these people again, and joined in this silly, empty frivolity. It taught him the lesson that he was tired of the life, and that he would be happy with Clare Stanton as his wife, and living quietly in the country. On the other hand, he admired Miss Blobbs, and her fortune was an attraction which it would be idle to underrate. She was certainly wonderfully handsome, and had given him every encouragement to admire her; but, after all, he would soon get

weary of her "savage music," as he called it, and tired of a worldly life.

De Fonterouge had promised these ladies to drive them to some neighbouring ruins the next day, where they were to have luncheon and other festivities, but he determined to give it up. He would start the next day for Paris, and wait there until the Darrells were ready to receive him. So a polite note was written, pleading a sudden call by his lawyer, and the next morning he turned his back upon Trouville, having finally made up his mind to propose formally for Miss Clare Stanton.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARQUIS PROPOSES.

WHEN the Darrells returned home their first visit was to the Vicarage. Lady Darrell at once sought for an interview with Clare alone, and told her that Monsieur de Fonterouge was coming to stay with them in a few days and that there could be no doubt that he intended to propose to her. Clare's manner at once showed Lady Darrell the joy that this news gave her. She told her that she had received a beautiful basket of flowers from Paris, and that there was no doubt that they came from him. All this confirmed Lady Darrell's ideas and she even congratulated Clare before she had received her offer. It was a brilliant match for her to make

she declared, and all the more so as Clare really loved the man. Lady Darrell did not share Madame de Taillement's theories on marriage. She held that love was the surest basis of happiness, and that money and position were only secondary considerations.

There was nothing to be said against the marriage if it could really be brought about. The young people loved each other, Monsieur de Fonterouge had a large fortune, and he belonged to an excellent Lorraine family which for generations had been Protestants; thus, there would not even be the difficulty of religion to overcome. Clare could receive the nuptial blessing from her own father, and they could have a delightful quiet little wedding in the old church at Houghton-Darrell. It all looked most promising, and Clare sat with her hand in that of Lady Darrell's listening with grateful pleasure to all the advice her friend gave her.

In the meantime Sir Guy was discussing the

same subject with Mr. Stanton—he reminded the Vicar of his predictions that Clare would not long remain unsought for, and he opened the old gentleman's eyes to the fact that that prediction had been fulfilled in the person of the Marquis de Fonterouge. The news almost startled Clare's father. He had seen, of course, that the Frenchman had paid his daughter a great deal of attention at Trouville, but he thought that with their departure the innocent flirtation had died a natural death. But Sir Guy convinced him that this was not the case. Monsieur de Fonterouge had himself proposed to come to Houghton-Darrell, and he had said enough on the subject of the necessity of his marrying, and the sort of life he would choose, to leave no doubt in Sir Guy's mind that Clare was the object of his choice.

Mr. Stanton had no rooted prejudices to foreigners. What he had seen of de Fonterouge he liked, and he knew that he was a Protestant.

There could therefore be no reason for withholding his consent if Clare loved him; and Sir Guy told him he felt pretty sure of this. Clare had said nothing to him on the subject, and the certainty with which Sir Guy spoke was therefore all the more surprising to him. He decided, however, to say nothing to Clare. The Marquis had not declared himself, and until he did so they must each keep their own counsel. In a few days they would know if his intentions were really serious.

The Darrells remained to luncheon but nothing more was said. Monsieur de Fonterouge was not even mentioned, but Clare, as Lady Darrell was leaving, whispered to her "Let me know when next you hear from him." Lady Darrell smiled and gave her a reassuring squeeze of the hand.

A few days later Monsieur de Fonterouge arrived, and the day afterwards he called at the Vicarage. There was no necessity for Clare to

speculate as to whether he had changed towards her. His whole face beamed with pleasure as she entered the room and they were both silent from emotion. Clare could think of nothing to say, and the Marquis felt too happy at seeing her again to find expression in words. Mr. Stanton gave him a kindly welcome, and then discreetly left the young people alone. Clare began by thanking him for his beautiful flowers, and then they began to talk about the happy Trouville days.

There was no question of love or marriage in all they said. De Fonterouge sat very close to her and looked passionately into her eyes as he spoke, but the subjects of their conversation were trivial and commonplace. Still, Clare felt that he loved her. Surely he had not come to bury himself in the country for any other reason except to be near her. There was no party at Darrell Hall, and it would certainly be dull for him unless he had a particular motive. He had

brought with him an invitation to dinner from the Darrells for the next evening, and he begged Clare to induce her father to accept it. Clare promised that she would do so, and the visit which had not been a long one, ended with the pleasure they both anticipated at meeting again the following evening.

De Fonterouge had determined not to commit himself during that visit, but it had cost him a great effort not to do so. He wished to reason calmly with himself after seeing her, and to be quite decided that he would be happy with her as his wife before rushing wildly over the precipice. As he rode slowly home, however, he had quite made up his mind. He knew now that he loved her and that he would never be happy until she had consented to be his wife. His relations might be annoyed at his marrying an Englishwoman, and all the friends who had interested themselves in his future would feel hurt that he had not consulted them; but he was

quite indifferent to all they might say or think. His mother would welcome his young wife in time, and when she knew her well, would certainly approve of the choice he had made.

The next evening decided it. When alone with Clare in the conservatory he told her that he loved her, and asked her if she thought she could sufficiently care for him to become his wife. The question was scarcely necessary: the look in Clare's eyes told him that he need have no anxiety as to her answer; and, as he pressed her in his arms when she had murmured her shy little "Yes" he felt the happiest man on earth.

After they had gone he sat down and wrote the following letter to her father:—

"Dear and Reverend Sir,—

"I am not aware what is the custom in England with regard to the affairs of the heart; but in my country the preliminary negotiations of a matrimonial alliance are conducted by the parents

of the young people interested. As, however, I have no one here to act for me with you, I have the honour hereby formally to propose for the hand of your charming daughter. I have always experienced for her an admiration at once respectful and profound. To-day I feel that without her life would be a vacuum. On her side I dare to hope that I am not entirely indifferent to her.

“The ancient title which I bear and the ample fortune which I possess will perhaps recommend my candidature to your benevolent consideration.

“Accept, dear and reverend Sir, the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments.

“DE FONTEROUGE.”

He was very proud of this letter as he read it over two or three times, and the next morning it was despatched by a messenger on horseback. After that he sought Lady Darrell, and told her what he had done.

Lady Darrell was very pleased at the termination of a love affair which had at first given her some uneasiness. She congratulated him warmly, and said that she was sure he would make Miss Stanton an excellent husband.

"You are not a very young man," she said; "you have seen a great deal of the world, and I think you have made a very wise choice. Clare knows absolutely nothing of life, you must remember, and it will be your duty to guard against her seeing any but the good side of it." And then she added: "I suppose you will live in France, at Fonterouge?"

"I will live wherever it pleases her best," he answered; "but, of course we must spend a certain time of the year there."

"And what will the Marquise say?" inquired Lady Darrell. "Have you told her anything about Miss Stanton?"

"I have not mentioned Clare's name as yet," he said. "But she will soon learn to love her as

I do myself. I should like the marriage to take place as soon as possible, so that I can introduce my wife to my mother before she leaves for Nice."

"You are sure of Clare's consent?" asked Lady Darrell.

"I spoke to her last night," he answered.

There was then only Mr. Stanton's answer to be waited for; and if, as he could scarcely doubt, that should be favourable, he would go over at once to the Vicarage and commence those happy days of courtship which were to prove the happiest of Clare's existence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARRIAGE AND THE HONEYMOON.

THE answer came in due course, and was naturally a satisfactory one.

“Your letter did not surprise me,” wrote the Vicar. “I had already had an inkling that something of the sort would happen. Clare tells me that she loves you, and that nothing would make her happier than to become your wife. She is very young—almost a child; and if I consulted my own feelings, I should have preferred that she waited a few years before taking such an important step in life. But I must not consult my own feelings. Clare has always been a good daughter to me; and though her absence will take most of the brightness out of my life, I feel

that I have no right to stand in the way of her happiness. Come over and see us whenever you like, dear Marquis, and we will talk more fully on the subject."

De Fonterouge showed this letter to Lady Darrell, and she agreed with him that nothing could be more hopeful. Of course, Mr. Stanton would feel parting with her, and he might probably stipulate for a long engagement, but they would all do all in their power to hurry on the marriage, especially as Lady Darrell herself very much disapproved of long engagements. In this supposition Lady Darrell was right. Mr. Stanton did at first speak of a long engagement—an engagement of a year—but no one would hear of it. What was there to wait for? Clare was eighteen, and many young ladies married at a much earlier age. She could come and stay with her father whenever he chose; and everything was done to persuade Mr. Stanton to alter his decision. In the end he gave way, and it was

settled that they should be married in two months. De Fonterouge went to Paris to see his lawyers, and arrange about settlements; and when he came back, after a few weeks' delightful love-making, the marriage took place.

It was entirely a private ceremony, the Marquis was in mourning for a near relation, and begged that it might be so. Only the Darrells and a few quite intimate friends of the Stantons were invited to the house, but, of course, the whole village turned out *en masse* and showered blessings and good wishes on the young bride. The villagers did not approve of their idol marrying a foreigner; some of Clare's old friends had spoken very plainly to her on the subject, but Clare only laughed at their ignorance, and after she had taken her affianced husband round to pay visits on some of her favourite old women, they slightly came round, and reluctantly admitted that he was "very polite," and, certainly, "mighty handsome." It was decided that they were to spend

the honeymoon in the Isle of Wight, that favourite haunt of honeymooners, and that after that they should go to Paris for a few weeks and then return to England, where they would take a country house for a few months.

The honeymoon was naturally the happiest time in their lives, and Clare had no doubt but that it would always last. They were so delighted to be always together, to know no one and to wander about, staying a few days at Shanklin, at Bonchurch, and at Ventnor, wherever the fancy induced them to halt—and Clare imagined that all her life would be like this. She would have no cares. Raoul would always love her as he loved her now, and she would be content to worship him.

But even honeymoons must have an end, and after three weeks spent in the Isle of Wight, de Fonterouge suggested that they should go to Paris. Autumn was now well advanced, the days were

very short, and, almost without allowing it to himself, the Marquis found that the evenings were rather long. In Paris they would have theatres to go to, and Paris after a long spell in the country is always enjoyable.

Clare willingly acquiesced. She was very pleased to go to Paris, although not for the same reason which makes most women like to go there. She did not care about dress, and she did not want to be bored with dressmakers; all she wanted was Raoul. Still he seemed to like the idea of having something to do in the evening, and therefore she would enjoy going to the theatre with him.

When they arrived in Paris Raoul told Clare that his mother had already left for Nice. He was very disappointed, he said, and, truth to tell, so was Clare. She had longed to make her mother-in-law's acquaintance, but Raoul had told her that his mother was an invalid, and that was

the reason why she could not come to their wedding.

However, he introduced her to plenty of friends in Paris, and they were much occupied in dining out and going to the play. The young Marquise de Fonterouge was very much admired, and created something of a sensation wherever she went. She did not understand half the plays she saw; and Raoul, who preferred light entertainments to the heavier fare provided by the Français and the Odéon, took her chiefly to the Boulevard theatres, where the slang of the day and the pieces altogether were quite beyond her comprehension.

On one occasion they were at the Palais Royal, and Chaumont was playing in that very naughtiest of naughty pieces, "Le Parfum." Clare did not understand a word of it, and when she asked her husband to explain the jokes which sent the whole house into roars of laughter, and he did so, she was inexpressibly shocked.

"And does that amuse you?" she asked gravely, after he had translated Chaumont's speech about the adulterous women being horse-whipped on the Place de la Concorde.

"I think it is funny," he said.

"I cannot see any wit in jokes which are coarse," she said.

"They are not so coarse in French," he explained; "you will have to learn my language better, and then you will enjoy these pieces better."

"I hope I shall never enjoy them," she said.

De Fonterouge slightly raised his eyebrows. Married women could see anything, he thought. Of course, the Palais Royal pieces were not those to which one could take young ladies; but when once a girl was married, surely it was a different thing.

But after a time Clare would have no more of them. She only really enjoyed the Opera, and she told her husband so. Then there was

the very slightest semblance of a tiff—the first tiny little speck on their bright horizon.

Raoul declared that he hated the Opera, there was no one but de Reske worth listening to, and he also hated society. He had married her because he knew she was not worldly, and would not drag him out to parties every night. But at the same time they must have some distraction. They could not sit opposite each other and yawn in each other's faces all the evening.

"Why should we yawn?" asked Clare; "you never yawned when we were in the Isle of Wight."

"That was two months ago," he answered; "we have said so much to each other since then that I am afraid there scarcely remains anything more for us to say."

Then Clare jumped up, and putting her arms round his neck, she said, "Oh, Raoul, you don't mean to say that you are tired of me already!"

"Of course I am not, my darling," he said, kissing her, "but as we are going to spend all

the winter in the country, we ought to see a few plays here; it will give us something to talk about."

So Clare gave in, and went and saw all the liveliest pieces, *Les Femmes Collantes*, *La Garçonnière*, and even visited the cafés chantants, which her husband also enjoyed. They did not amuse her, and she sat there with a face like a statue, not attempting to understand the numerous *doubles-entendre* with which the songs were so plentifully supplied. Her husband glanced at her occasionally and saw that she was bored, and the fact annoyed him.

"You are certainly a most unsympathetic audience," he said to her one evening.

"There is nothing to arouse my sympathy," she answered, and then they both relapsed into silence.

Raoul was beginning to think that life would be very dull if it was always to be passed by the side of a person who obstinately refused to

take any interest in his pleasures. He decided that he must take her to the country at once; perhaps there she would regain her spirits. And, moreover, he determined that the next time he came to Paris, it would be alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARQUIS TAKES HIS DEPARTURE.

THE Marquis de Fonterouge succeeded in finding the very house he wanted. It was situated a few miles only from Houghton-Darrell Vicarage, and Clare would be able to see as much of her father as she liked. For the first few weeks it looked almost as if the old Isle of Wight days were going to be lived over again.

Clare was pleased to be home again and see people she had known all her life, and her husband seemed to be devoted to hunting and to take very well to English country life. They were both as happy as the day was long, and it was decided that they should remain there until after Christmas, and that they should spend the

New Year at Fonterouge. For two months all went well, and they seemed to have settled down into a model couple. And then one day came a letter from Madame de Taillement, a letter which seemed to poison Raoul's mind, so completely did he alter.

"So you are married!" she wrote. "I would give anything to see you in your English home dosing the servants with daily prayers. Why don't you ask me to pay you a visit? I would accept. On second thoughts, no, I should refuse. You remember my experience of an English country house; I could not risk another experiment. You must come to Paris if you wish to see us—there is plenty to be seen and heaps of new scandals—I could amuse you for hours. There are some of the funniest stories I have ever heard going about just now. I cannot imagine you leading a humdrum life. Do you go about in slippers and smoke a pipe? or do you trudge over fields with your wife by your

side in a waterproof? Susannah Blobbs is still unmarried, and I am afraid likely to be so, she is terribly *difficile*, and *entre nous* I think she took a greater fancy to you than even she will admit. What a pity! But then everything in the world *is* a pity, at least so they say here. Write and tell me if true happiness is only to be found at Houghton-Darrell."

He crushed the letter up in his hand as he finished reading it, but nevertheless he read it again two or three times during the day. It brought back to him a great many memories of days spent in wild enjoyment, to which his present life offered a startling contrast. He had delighted in that exciting existence in Paris, but he had longed for a change after a time, and now he had got the change, was it for the better? Yes, he tried to make himself think that it certainly was, only there were times when the calm was rather too calm, when Clare's unswerving sweetness cloyed. He remembered seeing a piece

in Paris called "Un Mari dans du coton," and he compared himself to that gentleman. If only she would show a little more liveliness and passion, if she would get into a rage one day and even swear at the servants it would make a break in the monotony of their lives. And then, as he read Madame de Taillement's letter over again, he thought to himself that it was true. Clare did wear a waterproof, and walked by his side when he went out shooting. She did not care for dress, and she wore hob-nailed boots and very short dresses, which occasionally showed some dark thick stocking! And then he thought of the hose of Madame de Taillement and all her tribe, their thin spun stockings, their silk lingerie, their lace matinées, their delicate "fiv' o'clocks" in rich pink and white brocade; and it occurred to him that he had given up a great deal in marrying his little English angel. He had not arrived at the stage of going about the house in slippers, or even of smoking a pipe; but probably it was

merely a question of time. He would become localised, and do as all the people did around him.

That evening Clare noticed that his manner had changed. He was certainly more impatient than she had ever known him, and when she sat down and began to sing a little ballad after dinner he asked her if she knew nothing new, or if she intended to sing the same songs all her life. Clare felt hurt, and closed the piano at once.

"I am sorry my music does not please you," she said; "it used to."

It was just that which had struck him also. He took no pleasure now in things which had at one time delighted him. He was tired of her little ballads, and the question posed itself in his mind whether he would have tired of Miss Blobbs' banjo. At the present moment, and dwelling on the many truths contained in Madame de Taillement's letter, he thought not. Miss Blobbs had

other attractions beyond her banjo. The young American was lively and amusing, and could talk fluently on any subject. She would have been most companionable—perhaps more so than Clare. However, he must make the best of it—he must put up with a little dullness; but he would draw the line at the ballads. He felt that he could not stand them any longer. He made no answer to his wife's complaint that he used to like them, but merely yawned and asked what time it was.

Clare told him, and then there was a silence. She had tears in her eyes—those tears which Madame de Taillement had declared she would shed; but she said nothing. Presently he looked up and said:

“I think I shall go over to Paris next week.”

“Very well, dear,” she said: “it will be a nice change for us.”

“I did not mean you to go too,” he said; “I should go on business.”

"I should not like you to go without me, Raoul," she said, "I should be so dull alone."

"You have your father," he answered, "you could have him to stay with you if you liked."

"How long would you be away?" she asked.

"I have no idea," he answered; "as long as my business kept me."

"I would rather you did not go alone," she said in a low voice.

"But you did not seem to enjoy Paris the last time you were there," he remarked, annoyed at her persistence.

"I like any place where you are," she said, "and I should not at all like to be separated from you."

He could not help laughing at the way she clung to the point.

"You can scarcely call it a separation," he said, "I should only be away a few days."

"Is there any reason why I should not accompany you?" she asked.

"None," he said with his patience rapidly coming to an end, "but as you don't seem to like it, I won't go."

"Raoul, why are you so cross?" she asked going up to him. "Have I done anything to offend you?"

"No, nothing," he said, more exasperated than ever. "You are perfect, too perfect, if that be possible."

"You are very unkind," she said, resuming her seat. "Why do you speak so impatiently to me?"

"Because I don't like to be thwarted," he answered. "I wish to go over to Paris for a few days and you tell me that you cannot let me out of your sight. You treat me as if I were a child and required a nurse always by my side."

"I will say no more about it," she said, trying to keep back the tears. "I will stay at the Vicarage whilst you are away."

"That is more sensibly spoken," he said, immensely relieved. "I think I shall start on Tuesday."

"Very well, I will write to papa and tell him to expect me," she said, and so it was settled.

Raoul now began to count the hours until it was time to start. The more he thought over his life in Staffordshire, the more he wondered at the resignation with which he had been enabled to endure it. Ever since that fatal letter, he had seen things in their true light. He was simply becoming a country boor, and he must have a change at once. He would probably appreciate his wife better when he returned, but at present there was too much sameness. As he told her, if anything, she was too perfect, and he was beginning to discover that perfection in a wife was a mistake. They would both be benefited by a separation of a few days, and he would come back in a better humour to undergo the Christmas festivities.

So he answered Madame de Taillement's letter, which at first he had not intended doing; and he told her that he should be in Paris on the following Wednesday, and begged her to ask him to dinner on that evening.

Clare, on her side, wrote to her father, who was very surprised when he received the news that his daughter was coming to stay with him, and that her husband was going to Paris alone.

The next few days passed in the same calm, monotonous way, to which Raoul had thought himself accustomed, but now he could scarcely bear. He chafed beyond words at the resigned melancholy of his wife, and at the exasperating sameness of their *tête-à-têtes*. He regretted not having named an earlier day for his departure, but he determined that he would be courageous to the last, and the more he was bored now the greater would he enjoy his freedom in Paris. As he wished Clare good-bye on the Tuesday, she said to him:

"You will write to me every day, Raoul?"

"Of course I will," he answered, hurriedly—
"that is, if I have anything to say!"

With these unsatisfactory words he left her.
And from that hour Clare saw him no more.

CHAPTER X.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE.

ONCE in Paris, Raoul de Fonterouge plunged into a regular whirl of pleasure. This was, indeed, a change from the country life he had led for the last few months. He was like a school-boy home for the holidays, and ready for any amount of mischief. Moreover, after he had been there a fortnight, he found he did not get tired of the life, and he shuddered whenever he thought of returning home. All his old friends welcomed him back to the familiar haunts with open arms. He spent a good deal of his time at the Club, where he gambled recklessly, and he found but little time in which to write to his wife.

His letters became shorter and less frequent

as the days passed on, and when he received Clare's daily appeal, to know when he was coming home, he scarcely read it, and threw it aside impatiently. Certainly, there were times when he would look back with a certain feeling of pleasure upon the early days of their marriage, but this feeling was entirely overcome by the horrible conviction that it was all over, and that he had nothing to look forward to but a monotonous existence with an uncompanionable wife. He realised that he had made a ghastly mistake. He had really thought that she would prove the one love of his life, and now he discovered that she had only been one of his numerous whims, and that he infinitely preferred the society of Miss Blobbs and her noisy *entourage*. The fair American gave him no encouragement to flirt with her however. She could not waste her time upon a married man. She must first get married herself, and then she would perhaps follow the example of her French friends, who

seemed generally to prefer other women's husbands to their own. Her indifference piqued him, and he plainly showed that it did so; but Miss Blobbs had no pity for him. He might pose as a martyr, but she was practical above all things, and, although she liked him, he must be kept at a respectful distance.

The weeks succeeded each other and Christmas was now at hand, but still he lingered on in Paris. Clare wrote imploring letters to him to return, but he merely sent her very brief answers, in which he declared that his business still detained him, and that his return was most uncertain.

The more he reflected on his English life, the more he wondered at his ever having been able to endure it. He felt that he could not return to the ballads and hob-nailed boots, and he was still in this state of indecision, when he one day received a letter from Mr. Stanton.

Clare's father had noticed her drooping

spirits, the unutterable sadness which had overcome her, and as he remarked that his son-in-law's letters became less and less frequent, he thought it time to say a few words on his own account. So he wrote to Raoul and told him that unless his business was of a very important nature, he considered that he ought immediately to return to Houghton-Darrell. The neighbours were asking innumerable questions, Clare was miserable, and either she must join him at once, or he must come back to her.

This letter made Raoul furious. He took it to Madame de Taillement, and asked her if she had ever heard of such impertinent interference. The little Frenchwoman laughed, and said she had always predicted that he would find the old man a bore. There was nothing to be done for him. He should have taken her advice when it was really of value; now, all she could say was that he must go back to school; the holidays were over, and the schoolmaster was clamouring for him.

But this was just the advice he was least ready to take, and he at once determined not to follow it. He made no secret to Madame de Taillement of the fact that he was heartily sick of his wife. He found that their characters were utterly incompatible, he said, and he really saw no prospect of their ever being happy if they lived together. In his case "absence" had certainly not made "the heart grow fonder." On the contrary he thought of Clare now merely as one of his episodical loves,—the fancy of a few weeks, which it was most inconvenient to be tied to for life.

"There are such things as divorces and separations," said Madame de Taillement; "I don't know much about them myself, because I have always found it quite easy to love and to be loved without any interference on the part of the law, but in your case it might answer." And then she added, "I suppose your marriage was a perfectly legal one? Everything was *en*

règle? I have always heard that there are endless formalities to be gone through when people of different nations marry each other."

"I don't think there is the slightest loophole possible," he said, "but we might have a separation. A divorce is out of the question. Incompatibility of temper is not sufficient I fear. And if I were to behave as the veriest Blue Beard I am sure Clare would never apply for a divorce."

"Then there only remains the separation," she said. "Go and see your lawyer and find out how it can be managed."

Raoul took her advice, and the same afternoon he was closeted with Maître Boujaron to whom he confided his hopes and desires. The advocate in question declared that he would go carefully through the whole case, and see what was to be done. He thought he saw a means by which the marriage might be upset.

Raoul then went home and wrote to his

father-in-law. He told him that he very much disapproved of interference on the part of relations, and that the opinion of the neighbours was a matter of perfect indifference to him. As he was likely to remain much longer abroad, he would make Clare an allowance during his absence, and would immediately place £10,000 to her credit at Messrs. Coutts and Co.'s bank. He purposed visiting his mother at Nice, and perhaps from there he might go on to Algeria. To Clare he did not write, nor did he answer the wild letters of entreaty she wrote him, supplicating him to return.

After some weeks, Mr. Stanton, finding that their letters remained unanswered, determined to go over to Paris, but when he arrived there, he found that Monsieur de Fonterouge had left, and that his address was unknown.

The old vicar could only return to Clare and try his best to console her. But Clare's heart was broken, and with the crushing blow of her

disappointment and the certainty that Raoul no longer loved her, her health gave way, and for weeks she lay between life and death, a prey to brain fever.

CHAPTER XI.

ON WITH THE NEW.

IN the early spring Clare slowly recovered from her long illness. She was no longer the same Clare as we knew her at first. Her beauty had fled for ever, and she looked prematurely old and haggard. The allowance made to her by the Marquis was regularly paid, but from him she heard nothing.

At last Mr. Stanton decided that something must be done. His child could not remain any longer in an equivocal position separated from her husband, for no valid reason. Thus it was, that as soon as his daughter was well enough to be left alone, the old vicar went up to London, and consulted his solicitors as to what course he had better adopt. Mr. Eagle junior, of the

eminent firm of Sharp, Eagle, Cakebread, and Eagle, Solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, told the poor old gentleman that Clare could sue her husband for restitution of conjugal rights, and that this was the only remedy that occurred to him at the present time, but that he would lay the whole matter before counsel, who would possibly suggest some other course of action. And then Mr. Stanton returned to Houghton-Darrell.

Next day Mr. Eagle arranged a conference with the firm's chancery junior, Mr. Dawson Benbow, of Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, and, as a result, wrote a very strong letter to the Marquis de Fonterouge. A week afterwards the following reply reached them from Messrs. David Davies and Goldfinch, Old Jewry:—

2nd January, 1889.

DEAR SIRS,—In reply to your letter of the 23rd ulto., to the Marquis de Fonterouge, we are instructed, as London agents of his legal repre-

sentative, Maître Boujaron, of 22, Rue Vivienne, Paris, to place ourselves in communication with you in order to bring this most delicate affair to as speedy a settlement as possible.

Acting as solicitors to the daughter of the Rev. Richard Stanton, you require the Marquis to either resume cohabitation with her or to execute a deed of separation.

We understand that the Marquis left England some six months ago, and it is now four months since he has held any communication with Mr. Stanton's daughter. Your client now demands a deed of separation. As the Marquis has no intention of returning to England, we deeply regret to be compelled to notify you that the ground upon which he declines to execute such a deed is that, by French law, the lady in question is *not his wife*.

By the Articles 182 and 183 of the Code Napoléon, marriage with a French subject is valid only when the consent of the parents or surviving

parent of the two contracting parties has been applied for, and, if refused, a *sommation respectueuse* made.

In this case it is pretty clear that the consent of the Marquis's mother to his marriage with Miss Stanton was not obtained, nor indeed was ever applied for.

By the French law, therefore, the lady in question is Miss Stanton, and not the Marquise de Fonterouge.

In consideration, however, of her discontinuing the use of his name and title, the Marquis is prepared to place to her credit a further sum of £10,000.

Sincerely regretting the painful duty thus imposed upon us, and awaiting your reply, we are, gentlemen, your obedient servants,

DAVID DAVIES and GOLDFINCH.

* * * * *

The effect of this letter at Houghton-Darrell may be easily conceived. Mr. Stanton drove over

post haste to consult Sir Guy, but the baronet could administer small comfort on the subject. He himself had heard something of the sort before, he admitted, but he had given it little thought at the time of the marriage. Of course there were no words hard enough to apply to a man who would take advantage of a legal quibble to act so disgracefully and ruin the life of a young girl. Clearly they must go to London at once and see what could be done, but in the meantime what could be said to Clare? That was the most important question of all. How would she bear the shock?

Poor child! she had not to bear it long. When her father returned home from London, after verifying the facts contained in Messrs. David Davies and Goldfinch's letter, he found not the glad winsome face awaiting him, as he had so often seen it, but the corpse of his well-loved daughter laid out in a little room in which she had spent so many happy days of her girlhood.

There are some griefs too great to be borne.
Clare's had been one of them.

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Judging from an extract of a letter from the Paris correspondent of the "Daily Jupiter," the Marquis de Fonterouge can scarcely have looked upon himself, nor indeed have been regarded by his friends and acquaintances, in the light of a widower. The Paris correspondent in question wrote on the 14th of March, 1889: "Among the ladies who watched the French Oaks from the Tribune at Chantilly the other day, one of the most remarked, as well as remarkable, was the newly married Marquise de Fonterouge, who, as Miss Blobbs, of San Francisco, was for two seasons the loadstone of every fortune hunter in Europe. In marrying the Marquis, however, she is united to a man of ancient lineage, of ample fortune, and of unblemished reputation, who etc., etc., etc."

THE END,

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

“Social Vicissitudes” by F. C. Philips.

“A smarter or more amusing set of sketches has not appeared since Mrs. Linton lashed the ‘Young Woman of the Period.’”—*St. Stephen’s Review*.

“It requires to go back to Balzac in order to match the pitiless analyses and incisive descriptions which characterize this portfolio of letters exchanged between persons of both sexes, of diverse ages, and of all ranks in the world of fashion. . . . Incontestably places Mr. Philips in the first rank of our most artistic and brilliant writers.”—*Morning Post*.

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“As in a Looking Glass” by F. C. Philips.

“To Mr. Philips may be said to belong, therefore, the credit of paying back the first instalment of the debt which the English stage has so long owed to the French. The drama of passion does not yet rank as an English product, but in ‘As in a Looking Glass’ and his kindred stories Mr. Philips has handled with conspicuous success a subject which French writers have almost made their own. Having won his position as an English novelist, he has achieved the unprecedented distinction of furnishing the leading French actress of the day with the materials for one of her characteristic triumphs.”—*The Times*.

“Clever beyond any common standard of cleverness.”—*Daily Telegraph*.

“Unless Pope was a terrible libeller, which perhaps he was, every woman is at heart a rake. Mr. Philips does not prove the truth of his motto in the cunningly devised fable which bears the appropriate title ‘As in a Looking Glass’; but he certainly draws the reflection of an accomplished rake who is at the same time a very woman. . . . Mr. Philips’ story is a work of art, and, being much superior to the rough sketches of an average novelist, it discharges the true function of every work of art by representing things as they actually are, and teaching the observer to discriminate between appearances and realities.”—*Saturday Review*.



Philips, F. C.

Extenuating circumstances

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